United Nations S/PV.7680

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7680th meeting
Wednesday, 27 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Wu Haitao	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Toro-Carnevali

Agenda

Post-conflict peacebuilding

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-11832 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Post-conflict peacebuilding

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/302, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Angola.

The Council is ready to proceed to a vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2282 (2016).

The meeting rose at 10.05 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7681

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7681st meeting
Thursday, 28 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. De la Calle García
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Toro-Carnevali

Agenda

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Letter dated 15 March 2016 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/254)

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2016/297)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-11989 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Letter dated 15 March 2016 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/254)

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2016/297)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Côte d'Ivoire to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/381, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, as well as document S/2016/386, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Angola, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/254, which contains the text of a letter dated 15 March 2016 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004), concerning Côte d'Ivoire, addressed to the President of the Security Council. I also wish to draw members' attention to document S/2016/297, which contains the special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire .

The Council is ready to proceed to a vote on the draft resolutions before it. I shall first put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2016/381.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2283 (2016).

I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2016/386.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2284 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): It is very rare for the Security Council to encounter a situation in which, seeing a return to peace and stability, it can decide that its efforts have achieved their goals. That is the case today with Côte d'Ivoire, with regard to which the Council has just taken two major decisions. On the one hand, resolution 2283 (2016) decides to lift all United Nations sanctions on Côte d'Ivoire. On the other hand, resolution 2284 (2016) grants the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) a final mandate, with the goal of organizing the mission's final departure by 30 June 2017. France welcomes the adoption of those two resolutions.

Above all, today's resolutions reflect the length of the road travelled by Côte d'Ivoire towards reconciliation, peace and security. They are a tribute to the determination shown by the Ivorian people and the country's authorities to turn the page on the crisis. Côte d'Ivoire has proved its determination to fully take its future into its hands and itself to consolidate the achievements made in the areas of peace, security and lasting reconciliation. We commend that commitment. We support it. And we will continue to do so fully.

In a world where, unfortunately, crises continue to proliferate, rather than being resolved, the example of Côte d'Ivoire proves that the Security Council's tools can indeed achieve results in helping a country successfully get back on its feet following a crisis. In that context, UNOCI and the sanctions regime contributed to re-establishing peace and security in Côte d'Ivoire. In that regard, I pay particular tribute to the troop-and police-contributing countries, as well to all of UNOCI's personnel, who have done an outstanding job, and will continue to do so up until the mission's closing.

This approach has borne fruit. The resolutions that we have just adopted symbolize that success. We are pleased both for Côte d'Ivoire and for the Security Council, as well as for the United Nations.

Mr. Okamura (Japan) (*spoke in French*): My Permanent Representative, Ambassador Yoshikawa, has allowed me to deliver this statement on the occasion of today's adoptions, as I was personally present in the Ivorian crisis exactly five years ago. The worst of the Ivorian crisis took place in April 2011, while I was Japan's Ambassador in Côte d'Ivoire, during which my residence was attacked. The French army and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) saved my life and that of my colleagues. I once again extend my thanks to the courageous French operation and to UNOCI. It is for that reason that I am very moved to be here today.

Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolutions 2283 (2016) and 2284 (2016). We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Permanent Mission of France for taking the lead in preparing the resolutions. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Chair of the sanctions committee, the Permanent Representative of Uruguay, and to the Group of Experts for their dedication to their work.

Throughout the period of the sanctions regime, Côte d'Ivoire made undeniable, outstanding progress in consolidating peace. Japan would like to commend Côte d'Ivoire for its perseverance in the effort of stabilizing the country. Some issues remain, but Japan has trust that Côte d'Ivoire and the Ivorian people will rise up to those challenges.

We would also like to pay tribute to UNOCI for its work and its commitment to peace during the past 12 years. The Security Council must make sure that UNOCI concludes successfully, thereby becoming a good example United Nations peacekeeping overall. We hope that the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and UNOCI will coordinate even more during this final cycle of the mandate.

Japan will continue to contribute to consolidating peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire, both as a member of the Security Council and as an important bilateral partner.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): Today, as a reflection of the significant progress towards restoring peace and security in Côte d'Ivoire, the Security Council has taken the important decision to terminate the United Nations sanctions regime and to lay out a timeline for the full withdrawal of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Resolutions 2283 (2016) and 2284 (2016) are notable examples of how multilateral tools that are thoughtfully conceived and managed can serve our shared peace and security interests.

In 2004, Côte d'Ivoire was plagued by political turmoil and violence, which threatened its own stability as well as that of the region. The Council responded by establishing an arms embargo designed to prevent an influx of weapons from worsening the conflict. Over time, the Council added targeted financial sanctions and travel bans, including against those individuals who threatened the peace and national reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as an embargo on Côte d'Ivoire's diamond trade, one of the principal sources of funding for those fuelling the violence. Those measures were carefully designed to deter those who were undermining Côte d'Ivoire's peace and stability, prevent their access to financial resources and weapons and promote Côte d'Ivoire's return to the path of peace, stability and greater prosperity for its people.

Indeed, after the electoral crisis in late 2010, we saw the important effect of international diplomatic pressure and the arms embargo in preventing greater violence and arriving at a peaceful resolution by April 2011. In Côte d'Ivoire sanctions worked because of the effective collaboration of international partners and mechanisms, including the sanctions committee and the Group of Experts, UNOCI and, significantly, the Ivorian Government. Today's decision to terminate the sanctions on Côte d'Ivoire is testament to what can be achieved when sanctions are targeted, deployed with purpose and grounded within a clear strategy for promoting international peace and security.

We also welcome the steps taken today towards the transition and closure of UNOCI. The transition must be done in a responsible manner that allows for proper planning and coordination with the United Nations country team. As we move towards the 30 June 2017 for UNOCI's closure, we encourage the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to complete and enforce its security sector reform plan, which is critical to the sustainability of the nation's progress, and to redouble its efforts to achieve deeper national reconciliation and ensure fair and equitable justice. We also encourage the Government to continue its work on improving natural resource governance, particularly in the diamond and gold sectors, to ensure that potential local conflicts over land use and mining do not become flash points. We also encourage the Government to continue to fulfil requirements under the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.

The United States will continue to work closely with Côte d'Ivoire as it consolidates its progress towards peace and stability. Today we celebrate this transition and the role the Council has played in helping to restore peace to Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation strongly welcomes the adoption by the Security Council of resolutions 2283 (2016) and 2284 (2016) on Côte d'Ivoire, concerning the total lifting of sanctions against that brotherly country and the extension for a final term of the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) until 30 June 2017, respectively. I take this historic opportunity to extend the heartfelt gratitude and congratulations of my delegation to the delegations of France and Uruguay for the excellent work accomplished over the course of the process that led to today's double adoption.

For both the United Nations and Côte d'Ivoire, this moment demonstrates yet again that peacekeeping operations, as well as the judicious use of sanctions, are effective tools for maintaining international peace and security. The remarkable progress made by the Ivorian Government on all fronts — which I will not detail here — bears witness to that reality and made it possible to obtain the results we welcome today. It deserves all of our support and acknowledgement. In that regard, my delegation extends its warm congratulations to Côte d'Ivoire, through Ambassador Bouah-Kamon, whose firm political will and unfailing commitment were decisive. There will much to be do after the definitive withdrawal of UNOCI to consolidate the political and security gains made over the years.

Senegal shares a great deal with Côte d'Ivoire, both bilaterally and at the subregional level, in particular through the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Economic Community of West African States. Côte d'Ivoire is a pillar of both those organizations. We are convinced that, in spite of ongoing challenges, Côte d'Ivoire shall remain on its feet and will continue to play its perennial role as economic engine in the West African subregion. With regard to 30 April 2017, when all UNOCI military components will be withdrawn, the quick-reaction reserve force, which my country is honoured to oversee, will still be present.

This afternoon, the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, which Senegal has the honour to chair, will hold its second meeting. Ambassador Bouah-Kamon is warmly invited to share his country's experience of a peacekeeping operation over the years. The brotherly country of Côte d'Ivoire can always count on the support of Senegal and the international community, in particular the Security Council.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will be very brief. I have made the impromptu decision to speak, having been encouraged by the words of praise my delegation has received from some of my colleagues here with regard to our work in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004), concerning Côte d'Ivoire. To be quite frank, my delegation played a very limited role. In reality, we merely reaped the benefit of the work done by the person who preceded me in the chairmanship of the Committee, Ambassador Cristián Barros Melet of Chile, who is present in the Chamber today. He and the Chilean delegation are far more deserving of congratulations than am I.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

Thanks to the common efforts of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the international community, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire has remained stable of late. Comprehensive progress has been achieved in such areas as political dialogue, national reconciliation, security sector reform, demobilization and the fight against impunity. The reconstruction of the country and economic development have begun on a good footing. China appreciates the efforts of the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire to maintain peace and stability. We congratulate that country on its achievements and

wish it every success in attaining prosperity and wealth at an early date.

China welcomes the comprehensive lifting of sanctions against Côte d'Ivoire by the Security Council. That is of great significance, as it represents the international community's due recognition of Côte d'Ivoire's achievements in the peace process and development. It is an example that the Council can refer to when dealing with other African hotspot issues. At present, some African countries are still subject to Council sanctions. China hopes that these countries and the international community can engage in common efforts to push for the speedy relaxation of the situation, achieve progress in their respective political processes, and embark as soon as possible down the path towards stability, development and the comprehensive and speedy lifting of sanctions.

Sanctions are not an end in themselves. The Council should keep itself abreast of the progress being made and, in keeping with developments in the countries concerned, adjust and eventually lift sanction measures in a timely manner so as to create conditions that are conducive to the re-establishment of peace and the development of economies.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bouah-Kamon (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): The Security Council has just unanimously adopted resolutions 2283 (2016) and 2284 (2016) in which, respectively, it lifts the sanctions regime concerning my country and extends the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) for a final term, until June 2017.

My delegation welcomes the adoption of these two resolutions, and sees them as a recognition of the many efforts made by the Ivorian Government since the end of the Ivorian crisis in 2011. In them, we also see the effectiveness of the resolute commitment of the United Nations and the entire international community to Côte d'Ivoire. My Government takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to the United Nations, and through it to the Secretary-General, the Presidents and members of the Council, the successive chairs of the sanctions committee, the troop-contributing countries and France, a great country whose support for my country has never been lacking.

With the lifting of the sanctions regime, to which my country was subject since 2004, the Government will henceforth devote itself, among other things, to addressing important issues related to security and the implementation of laws overhauling its military and security structures, with a view to modernizing them and making them more effective. My country is aware of the remaining challenges that still need to be overcome. In that regard, I would like to emphasize that my country will shoulder all of its responsibilities commensurate with its commitments and obligations.

In accordance with paragraph 14 of resolution 2283 (2016), the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire will come to a definitive end in June 2017. My country welcomes the untrammelled success of the mission and would like to assure the United Nations and the international community of its firm determination to continue our exemplary cooperation with UNOCI so that, by the end of its final mandate, the mission, which — as we are all aware — has already enjoyed great success, will be celebrated and go down in the history of United Nations peacekeeping operations as a success story to be replicated in other parts of the world.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7682

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7682nd meeting

Thursday, 28 April 2016, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Toro-Carnevali

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/384)

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16-11995 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/384)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. O'Brien, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/384, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: It does not need me to tell each and every one of the members of the Security Council that the impact of five long years of conflict in Syria defies understanding, let alone description. The human toll and suffering are sickening and obscene in that senseless fight where there is nothing much left to gain. Hundreds of thousands are dead. Millions have been displaced. Countless families have been torn apart and towns decimated. Basic infrastructure is destroyed. For many who are merely surviving, life is miserable. Deliberately deprived of food and medicine, many face the most appalling conditions of desolation, hunger and starvation. We all must be ashamed that this is happening on our watch.

The recent cessation of hostilities has provided a much-needed moment of respite for some of those who are suffering in this terrible conflict. Yet the recent developments on the ground show a substantial and worrisome deterioration, not least with increase of violence reported in Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, Latakia and rural Damascus. Just this morning, Syrian Government forces are reported to have restarted using aerial bombardment in Dar'a governorate for the first time since the start of the cessation of hostilities.

It is the duty of the Security Council to ensure that every possible avenue to end the violence be explored. I reiterate the call for sustained, safe, unconditional and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance. The parties to the conflict, the Security Council and the co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group must exert every effort to revive the cessation of hostilities. The Security Council must not squander the opportunity presented by talks in Geneva and by the cessation in hostilities to put an end to the massive human suffering in Syria. The world and the people of Syria need this. They need Council action.

It is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of the fighting. Since just the other day, an increase in fighting in Aleppo city since 22 April, with reported airstrikes on eastern parts of the city and improvised mortar rounds and artillery shells impacting in western parts, has left dozens of civilians dead and wounded. Civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, has also been damaged. Yesterday, air strikes in eastern Aleppo city yesterday struck Al-Quds hospital, killing at least 20 people, including 2 doctors. Another hospital in western Aleppo has also reportedly been hit. It is horrific that the presence of a hospital or health facility is now perceived by neighbours to be a threat to their safety. As the Chairman of the Task Force on Humanitarian Access, Mr. Jack Egeland, said, today this is a catastrophic deterioration

On 19 April, a marketplace in Marat Al-Numan, in Idlib governorate, was hit by air strikes, killing more than 40 people and injuring some 145. A further 10 people were killed in a similar strike on a market in nearby Kafr Nubl. The killing of civilians, including five young children, is further evidence of a grotesque want of humanity on the part of those carrying out the attacks.

Fighting between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and non-State armed opposition groups in northern Aleppo governorate continues. I am very concerned about recent reports of ISIL advances east of Azaz, which threaten several camps for internally displaced persons. In that area, near the border with Turkey, some 40,000 people have been displaced again, with many struggling to find adequate shelter. In Atarib

town, multiple air strikes hit the compound of the White Helmets — that is, the Syrian civil defence force. Five brave men who dedicated their lives to saving others were themselves and tragically killed.

Violent clashes on 6 April between ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp have prevented people from leaving and significantly limited the community's access to much-needed aid. While between 13 February and 7 April, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was able to provide people in Yarmouk camp with food and medical aid, the Agency has been unable to deliver additional supplies since.

Despite the enormous challenge, the sheer courage of our United Nations people on the ground and our humanitarian partners continues to deliver life-saving assistance and support to millions of people across the country. The World Food Programme (WFP), for example, reached 3.7 million people with food aid in March. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) held a nation-wide polio campaign in March, reaching over 2.1 million children. This week, UNICEF, WHO and partners began another immunization campaign to reach 2 million children in besieged, hard-to-reach and underserved areas.

Moreover, humanitarian cross-border convoys this year are reaching nearly twice as many people compared to the same period last year. In March alone, convoys provided food aid to over 1 million people, as well as medical supplies, non-food items, water, sanitation and hygiene, and educational supplies to tens of thousands. Since cross-border convoys began in 2014, they have provided sustained assistance to many millions.

Humanitarian relief also continues to reach civilians through cross-line inter-agency operations. Twenty-one convoys deployed in March, and 24 operations have proceeded already in April. Since January, assistance has been provided to 778,175 people in need in besieged, hard-to-reach and other priority cross-lines locations. This week, the United Nations reached Rastan, the third-largest city in Homs governorate, for the first time since April 2015 — a year ago. Some 122,500 people received vital assistance, including nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, health-care supplies, education and other basic relief items. In a sobering reminder of the risk our colleagues face, a mortar struck in front of one of the vehicles in the convoy to Rastan, injuring the driver and killing a civilian. I condemn such attacks on humanitarian workers in the strongest, most uncompromising terms, and call again on all parties to allow unfettered and safe access to those in need.

Since 10 April, WFP has led and carried out 14 high-altitude airdrops to those cut off by ISIL in Deir ez-Zor city, meeting the immediate needs of some 100,000 people. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is now distributing the assistance on the ground. While airdrops are used only as a last resort, with the support of many member States WFP is able to continue the operation to send food, as well as other humanitarian supplies, such as medicine, nutrition, water and sanitation supplies.

Evacuations have taken place as part of the four towns agreement. On 20 April, the evacuation of over 515 people from the besieged towns of Madaya, Zabadani, Fo'ah and Kafraya, including 80 medical cases, was successfully completed. This is the largest medical evacuation in Syria undertaken to date. But, sadly, it is too late for some. We should not forget the tragic deaths of two children and a young man in Madaya, whose requests for medical evacuation were rejected. While I welcome the evacuation, I underscore the call on all parties to the conflict to ensure that medical evacuations are timely and never tied to political agreements or issues of reciprocity. The provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance to civilians in dire need, must not be a political question. It must never be a bargaining chip in the war.

International humanitarian law is very clear on medical treatment. The sick and wounded must be given the medical care required by their condition. Medical personnel must be protected in all circumstances, and attacks against medical facilities are prohibited. Despite this, the withholding of medical treatment continues to be used as a weapon of war in Syria. We continue to receive reports of parties to the conflict ignoring these basic tenets of international humanitarian law. In March, Physicians for Human Rights reported one attack on a medical facility in Latakia, and that four medical personnel were killed, while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that a medical facility in Deir al-Asafir in Damascus was destroyed by an air strike. As I highlighted, further attacks on medical facilities and personnel in Aleppo in recent days have destroyed another two hospitals.

The removal of medicines and medical supplies from aid convoys continues. Last week, surgical as well as basic health supplies, such as antibiotics and pain-killers, were not allowed onto the Kafr Batna

convoy. This week, on the convoy to Rastan, the Syrian authorities removed medicines from supplies, and scissors and anesthetic medicines from midwifery kits. This inhumane practice directly leads to unnecessary suffering and loss of life. We must continue to press the Syrian Government to allow the delivery of medical supplies. This is not idle hearsay; it can be proved, and no one should doubt that it will be when, one day, there is no fighting and those responsible are held to account. And they will be; there can never be impunity for this behaviour.

While the delivery of humanitarian aid and the capacity of the humanitarian community to overcome deplorable conditions and limitations are inspiring, it is important to remember that they are also stark reminders of the ultimate failure of parties to the conflict to uphold their fundamental responsibility to protect the people of Syria and respect international humanitarian law. The continued failure to do so will result in more death and more suffering.

I remain particularly concerned about reaching areas where complete access has been regularly denied. The United Nations has submitted the inter-agency convoy request for May to reach 35 towns in critical need, and I call for access to be granted without delay, including to Darayya and Duma. As has been reported many times, these areas are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Following the 16 April needs-assessment visit of the United Nations to Darayya, which managed to get into the town for the first time since 2012, the world has seen both that access is possible and that the need is acute and desperate. The town has been 80 to 90 per cent destroyed; there has been no electricity since 2012; and water, sanitation and waste management infrastructure is beyond repair. Households are unable to consume more than one meal per day and are giving priority for eating to their children. In the most severe cases, families are enduring entire days without eating, sending children into the streets to beg and being reduced to eating grass and wild vegetation. Following the visit to Darayya, the United Nations submitted a specific request to deploy aid to the city. Intensely frustratingly, that has yet to be granted. While access continues to be denied, the population of Darayya remains trapped, hungry and — let us be clear — starving. That is a word I never use unless it is true.

As I noted in my report last month, I welcomed the simplification of procedures to request cross-line convoys. However, the application of these simplified procedures has not been consistent — far from it. The Government did respond within the agreed seven working days to our April cross-line plan, approving 7 out of 11 locations. Syrian authorities also agreed to provide facilitation letters within three days so that convoys could safely proceed. However, delays in receiving the facilitation letters within the specified three-day time frame have delayed many convoys, depriving civilians of the assistance they desperately need. If the new process for inter-agency convoys is to be effective, the timely issuance of facilitation letters must be met.

We do not need just sustained, unimpeded and unconditional access, but real and enduring protection for civilians and an improved humanitarian situation for the millions in need. Access cannot be a one-off or even an occasional event, and it cannot limit or prevent certain types of aid. The current levels of access still leave civilians starving and without medical care. Even in places reached this year, the needs are complex and require a comprehensive and consistent humanitarian response, which is currently often denied by parties to the conflict. Just as the humanitarian community relentlessly and bravely presses forward in efforts to reach more of the people in need in Syria, so too must the parties to the conflict grant safe, unimpeded access and with all of us — especially the Security Council — work towards a sustainable political solution that can allow humanitarian aid to respond most effectively.

The people of Syria cannot afford to see the situation move backwards again. If the international conununity fails to maintain momentum, with a sustained cessation of hostilities and full humanitarian access, the situation can and will only spiral further out of control. The international community simply must not let the chance we have today slip away. Frankly, I am not sure just how many more days, weeks or months the long-suffering people of Syria can endure this protracted humanitarian catastrophe.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7683

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7683rd meeting
Thrusday, 28 April 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Delattre/Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi/ Mr. Gasso Matoses
	Ukraine	Mr. Prystaiko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft/Mr. Meek
	United States of America	Ms. Power/Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Toro-Carnevali

Agenda

Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; and Ambassador Martin Sajdik, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik, who are joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kiev.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: As the conflict in the eastern Ukraine enters its third year, the Security Council is meeting today with both a sense of urgency and hope. The continued failure to fully implement the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements has served to underscore the crucial need to make progress towards a political settlement of the conflict.

Since the Security Council last considered the situation in Ukraine, on 11 December 2015 (see S/PV.7576), some positive developments have been registered. Not least among them was the fact that the ceasefire was largely respected during the last weeks of 2015. A second development was the commitment announced at the beginning of March this year, in the framework of the security working group, on the implementation of additional sectorial agreements on demining in priority areas, as well as the prohibition of military training in proximity to the contact line — all encouraging steps.

The meeting of the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, the Russian Federation and Ukraine on 3 March and the continued investment of time and political capital by all the relevant actors have also been instrumental in efforts to bridge prevailing differences and keep the focus on concrete milestones towards the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Regular meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group and its four working groups — on political affairs and security, humanitarian and economic matters — continue to be central in that regard.

As the Council is well aware, on 14 April the Ukrainian Parliament voted for the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Mr. Volodymyr Groysman. The new Government's commitment to the implementation of the Minsk agreements has been widely welcomed. Such commitment is expected to be converted into further concrete actions.

Those developments are highly valuable in their own right. However, those positive steps forward continue to be heavily undermined to some extent by an overall precarious and unsustainable situation in the conflict area. The total number of conflict-related casualties continues to increase, and now stands at more than 30,700, including more than 9,300 killed and almost to 21,400 injured since the beginning of the conflict, in mid-April 2014. The latest tragic incident, which occurred on 27 April when at least four civilians were killed and at least eight were injured by shelling in the village of Olenivka, near the city of Donetsk, is a stark reminder of the high human cost of the continued conflict.

While some of the recent civilian casualties have been caused by indiscriminate shelling, most are caused by landmines, booby traps and other explosive remnants of war, which continue to represent the biggest threat to civilian life and security, underscoring the urgent need for extensive mine clearance and mine-awareness actions on both sides of the contact line.

We are pleased that Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik are joining us, despite the late hour in Kyiv. We look forward to hearing their assessments of the security situation in eastern Ukraine, and wish to thank the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission for continuing to dutifully carry out its mandate in what is often a challenging and dangerous environment.

The Special Monitoring Mission's role in eastern Ukraine remains instrumental. In order to carry out its

mandate, the Mission must urgently be granted full and unfettered access, including to the border, as stipulated under the Minsk agreements. All efforts to hinder such access should be condemned, and although the restrictions are happening on both sides of the contact line, according to statistics provided by the Special Monitoring Mission, they seem to take place more in rebel-held areas. Efforts to harass, intimidate and especially to perpetrate violence against the Mission must be deplored, and must cease immediately.

Fighting is still being reported daily, with a sustained period of escalation witnessed over recent weeks and months at levels not seen since the intense phase of the conflict in August 2014. The frequent clashes are also coupled with increased presence and use of proscribed heavy weaponry, with more such weapons now being reported outside of storage sites. In addition to these sobering developments, there is a lack of systemic mine action and reportedly high levels of military readiness and preparedness. This precarious situation should not be allowed to persist because it will create fertile ground for a further deterioration of the situation. All parties must immediately cease hostilities and implement in earnest their commitments under the Minsk agreements, as well as those made since then in the Trilateral Contact Group and its Security Working Group.

Clearly, an improvement in the security situation would be crucial to creating an environment conducive to progress in the political sphere. Of note are the ongoing negotiations in Minsk and among Normandy partners related to modalities for holding local elections in rebel-held areas of Donetsk and Luhansk under Ukrainian law and as per international standards. We hope that ensuing political, technical and legal divergences can soon be overcome. All concerned should find common ground and take immediate steps to live up to the commitments they have undertaken on other bedrock political issues, including amnesty and special-status constitutional changes, as well as on exchange of prisoners.

The situation in Ukraine is also grave on the humanitarian front. More than 3 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance, especially those close to the contact line and in areas beyond Government control. The ongoing suspension by the de facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces of almost all operations of the United Nations and and international non-governmental organizations since July 2015 is of great concern. Undue bureaucratic impediments deprive hundreds of thousands of people access to urgently needed essential services, supplies and other protection activities.

This is further compounded by the decision of the Ukrainian Government to suspend social payments, including pensions, to an estimated 600,000 displaced people, pending verification of their status. While the legitimate right of the Government to combat fraud is understandable, it is important to put in place a transparent system that provides clear information about the criteria for any cancellation of benefits and proper communication to those concerned. It is also important that the freedom of movement of civilians be ensured and that they have sustained and safe access across the contact line. As a result of the recent closure of and failure to open new checkpoints, many civilians continue to queue for hours, often at night, in unsafe locations just to access basic services or to visit families and properties.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, through its monitoring mission in Ukraine, continues to monitor and report on the situation of human rights throughout the country and to make recommendations to all parties to the conflict. There are a number of pressing human rights concerns. The question of missing persons and the need to create a mechanism by which all parties to the conflict exchange information and cooperate to establish the whereabouts of those who have gone missing in the conflict zone remains critical. In Crimea, isolation from mainland Ukraine continues to grow, with deepening concerns for the human rights situation in the peninsula. The recent decision to ban the activities of the Mejlis, the representative body of the Crimean Tatars, are of particular concern.

On a positive note, on 29 December 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine published a national human rights action plan. This is a welcome step, as the document is a road map for addressing systemic human rights challenges and conflict-related matters, and envisages a list of actions to be taken by different State institutions pursuant to the national human rights strategy. It is of paramount importance that the plan be implemented. However, nearly four months after its adoption, not all activities envisaged during that period have been implemented.

The Secretariat continues to cooperate closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and remains ready to support, as requested and deemed helpful, the complex and challenging mandate entrusted to OSCE in Ukraine. We commend the vital contributions of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, the Trilateral Contact Group and its four working groups, and the Normandy four leaders, as well as other diplomatic partners, for their efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

In coordination with local and regional organizations, the United Nations also continues to carry out critical and effective work in the humanitarian, human rights, reconstruction and reconciliation spheres, aimed at responding to the urgent and longer-term needs of the affected population in Ukraine. Ultimately, however, progress in the peace process will depend on the political will of the parties and on their readiness and willingness to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict through tangible deeds, both on the ground and at the negotiating table. The United Nations remains committed to supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict in a manner that fully upholds the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Apakan.

Mr. Apakan: I wish to thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council regarding the situation in Ukraine.

Violence in eastern Ukraine is once again reaching a peak. The fighting around some hotspots varies in intensity over time. Days of relative calm are followed by periods of intense escalation. Just recently, from 11 to 17 April, the Mission has observed particularly intense violence between Avdiivka and Yasnuvata, to the north of Donetsk. This was the highest level of violence observed since August 2015. Armed violence also continues to take place around the cities of Zaitseve, Horlivka, Svitlodarsk and Debeltseve. An upsruge in ceasefire violations has also taken place in the south of Donetsk region and in Luhansk region. Heavy weapons are in frequent use.

The Special Monitoring Mission is also finding an increasing number of weapons missing from permanent storage sites and from known weapon-holding areas. Many of those facilities are completely abandoned. Our observations suggest that many of those weapons are in use at the contact line.

There are about 700 civilians living in and around the contact line. They are suffering. In that context, I should also underline the recent tragedy that took place in Olenivka. That is the reason we need the cessation of hostilities and a full and sustainable ceasefire, for the settlement of the problem as well as to lessen the suffering of the people.

Direct attacks against the Special Monitoring Mission and its assets happen with impunity for the perpetrators. Serious security incidents have taken place recently. Therefore, we have temporarily imposed some restrictions on our patrolling. Impunity for people who threaten or violenty mistreat the Special Monitoring Mission, or who violate its freedom of movement, must end.

The inaction of those who have committed to the ceasefire to withdraw weapons and to protect the Special Monitoring Mission presents a direct challenge to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements. It undermines efforts made towards stabilization and normalization and endangers their further implementation. The Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) could be instrumental in addressing those challenges. However, the Mission's monitoring shows that the JCCC still has not significantly increased its effectiveness.

The Special Monitoring Mission has been adapting its operations to the chaning situation and has further expanded its presence on both sides of the contact line. We have increased the number of locations from where we conduct our monitoring, and have increased our efforts to monitor the border areas not under the control of the Government. The Special Monitoring Mission is now operating out of 13 bases, on both sides of the contact line. More bases are needed, including in non-Government-controlled areas. The Special Monitoring Mission is ready to engage, but needs reassurances on safety and security from those in effective contol in the respective locations. Currently, the Mission has 700 monitors from 47 countries, with the aim of further expansion. Such expansion in number and geographical reach is accompanied by an expansion in technical capabilities, including unarmed aerial vehicles, satellite imagery and cameras in certain sensitive areas.

Human suffering as a result of the conflict is increasing. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the conflict remains one of the main problems. The plight of IDPs serves to underline the urgency for the sides to continue the peace process. Focused work on gender issues has been a priority for the Special Monitoring Mission. In the conflict area, women, older persons and children are suffering. Women throughout the country appear to be quick in self-initiation and demonstrate a resilient attitude towards the challenges in difficult humanitarian situations.

All civilians in the conflict area face great difficulties when attempting to cross the contact line. That disproportionately affects — I repeat — older persons, children and women. During recent months, several of the few official crossing routes have been closed for short or expanded periods. The closure of checkpoints in Luhansk region considerably limits the possibilities for people to reach their places of work, use the services of hospitals and reach family members.

Throughout the country, the Special Monitoring Mission is continuing its cooperative relationship in humanitarian matters with the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF to ensure the effective coordination of efforts on the ground.

Armed formations along the contact line are standing too close together, and have recently moved even closer in some locations. That represents a violation of the Minsk agreements and must not continue. Disengagement is a necessity in the current situation. Military formations need to move further apart to stop the cycle of violence. Increased dialogue across the contact line and confidence-building measures can complement initiatives for disengagement.

Allow me to repeat: a sustainable ceasefire is of central importance to the further implementation of the Minsk agreements. In that context, I should say that Ambassador Sajdik, in cooperation with the Special Monitoring Mission, is working on a truce for the festive season and the upcoming Orthodox Easter holiday. We believe that will be an occasion for the sides to show visible and decisive action for tranquillity and a full ceasefire.

Attacks the Special Monitoring Mission must stop. All signatories to the Minsk documents must live up to their commitments to safeguard and ensure the safety and security of the civilian Special Monitoring Mission. And the JCCC needs to act in line with the responsibilities assigned to it. Over the past week, I addressed three letters to the signatories of the Minsk package of measures in that regard. In close cooperation with the Trilateral Contact Group, the Special Monitoring Mission will continue to work towards the stabilization and normalization of Ukraine, on the basis of the principles and commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Apakan for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sajdik.

Mr. Sajdik: First of all, I would like to thank China, in its capacity as President, for having invited Ambassador Apakan and me to brief the members of the Security Council about our common efforts for a peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

On 27 February 2015, my predecessor, Heidi Tagliavini, briefed this body (see S/PV.7395) on the results of the 15 February Minsk summit of the Normandy Four, namely, the Presidents of France, Russia and Ukraine and the German Chancellor. Ms. Tagliavini also briefed the Council on the Minsk agreements. Since then, the Minsk process continued on track with the aim of implementing the agreements by the end of 2015. We did not succeed in living up to that ambitious target, but we have made considerable progress in the four areas covered by the agreements, namely involving, security, political, humanitarian and economic issues. The main achievement of our efforts is that we have succeeded in substantially reducing the number of victims, both military and civilian, especially last autumn with the ceasefire starting on 1 September, the beginning of the school year.

Under the outstanding leadership of Ambassador Apakan, important decisions in the security field were reached, such as on the withdrawal of heavy weapons and on demining. The implementation of those decisions by the sides of the conflict, as we have just heard, unfortunately leaves ample room for improvement.

Ceasefire violations have lately reached alarming numbers, as we also have just heard from Ambassador Apakan. That needs to stop now. Ahead of the upcoming

Orthodox Easter holidays, the sides really need to fully respect the ceasefire. Secure conditions must be created for the people living in proximity to the hostilities as well as for all those who will cross the line of contact during the upcoming holidays.

In the political field, work is being concentrated on the modalities for local elections in the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast and on amnesty. The corresponding laws, which have to be adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament, will directly impact all actors involved. That will of course demand further efforts, but most of all it will demand a willingness by all participants to compromise. The elections will have to be held in a secure environment — a secure environment before and during, but also after the elections. Repeated severe cases of intimidation against the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) with no apparent consequences for the perpetrators have cast a shadow on the impartiality of local security forces in the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast, which is a precondition for the holding of elections that correspond to OSCE standards. In the humanitarian and economic spheres, we have achieved some progress in the release and transfer of detainees as well as in the rehabilitation of railway and water-supply systems.

But there is still a long way to go, especially as to unhindered humanitarian access, including in particular for United Nations entities and the International Committee of the Red Cross. One aspect of the Minsk agreements is still waiting for an appropriate answer — the full restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the re-establishment of sovereign control over the Ukrainian side of the State border with the Russian Federation in the Donbas region.

Many issues of Minsk are intertwined. What we therefore need is a package for a sustainable solution to the conflict. I believe the examples I mentioned here show that Minsk works and that further progress is possible, and will be possible with the firm political backing of the Normandy Four and other important actors.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Sajdik for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

I welcome to the Security Council Mr. Vadym Prystaiko, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chief of Staff of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Prystaiko (Ukraine): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for responding to our request to convene today's meeting. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your successful presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank for your constructive and effective work. My only regret is that this meeting could not be held on Friday so that my Minister could make it to New York from Beijing, which he is currently visiting, to address the Council.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank the United Nations and its States Members that took part in the General Assembly meeting held a few days ago (see A/70/PV.92) to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the sad day when the Chernobyl disaster occurred. Our prayers go to the families of those who died or who were otherwise affected by the tragedy in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and far beyond our borders.

Two days ago, I was at the Chernobyl station and witnessed the signing by the representative of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and our Ministry of Energy, in the presence of the President of Ukraine, of the additional agreement to permit the international community to gather the resources needed to finalize the Chernobyl project. I am happy to report that the new confinement — the biggest moving structure ever built by humankind — is close to completion. In November, it will start rolling over the station, thereby effectively sealing off the remnants of the reactor and preventing further radioactive contamination. Ukrainians are deeply grateful to all donor nations, the five permanent members of the Security Council, the Group of Seven, the European Union, the EBRD, industry and international organizations for bringing efforts and resources together and striving to turn the page on the biggest technological disaster in our history. This is a great achievement, and we do believe that, by such concerted efforts, we will be able to resolve all outstanding issues, regardless of how impossibly complicated they might seem at the moment.

Unfortunately, this is not the only issue that brought me here today. As if the land of Ukraine had not suffered enough already, as Council members know, we have been struggling for more than two years against the

aggression of our neighbour and our formerly brotherly nation, the Russian Federation. As we have heard today from the briefers — and I am grateful to the Secretariat, the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine for familiarizing the Council with the state of affairs on the ground — over 30,000 Ukrainians have fallen victim to the hostilities in Donbas, with approximately 10,000 killed and 21,000 wounded. More than 1.7 million Ukrainians have had to leave their homes and have become internally displaced persons. Every day Ukrainian families lose a son, a father, a husband, a brother. Every day Ukrainian men and women are wounded, often becoming physically and psychologically handicapped for the rest of their lives.

On 23 April, just the other day, four Ukrainian soldiers were killed and five were wounded as a result of shelling by militants. Last night, we witnessed the tragic deaths of three civilians. There were also seven wounded; they were probably caught in cross-fire. That incident will have to be properly investigated. Ukraine has already invited OSCE monitors to the site.

This war is very hybrid in nature, but it is very real in terms of spilled blood. It is claiming victims regardless of their ethnicity or the languages they speak. They are Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Germans, Poles, Jews; all of us are the victims.

But there is one particular nation whose fate is again at stake — the Crimean Tatars. This indigenous population of the Crimean peninsula is again suffering, as it did 60 years ago, from Moscow's brutal grip. Then it was Stalin, now it is the new Great Leader. People are disappearing. The only representative body — the Mejlis — was banned by occupation forces under the false pretext — one that has become very widespread — that it was engaged in extremist activity.

Incidentally, a couple of days ago, a Russian citizen and resident of Moscow had her time in jail extended for having been so extremist as to have Ukrainian books in her possession. That is a serious crime indeed, given that the detainee is a director of the only official Ukrainian library in Moscow.

But back to Crimean Tatars, whose homes are being raided and whose unique culture and language are being endangered once again. Tatar leaders warn that the ban potentially threatens more than 2,000 members of some 250 central and local Mejlis structures, which are traditionally elected by Crimean Tatars. At any time, they can be accused of conducting extremist activity, prosecuted and re-expelled from Crimea. More than 130 criminal trials against Crimean Tatars have been held, and 21 Crimean Tatar representatives have been kidnapped — 9 are still missing and 3 were recently found dead.

I am calling today on the Security Council to demand that the Russian Federation restore the rights of the Crimean Tatars, ensure that the sham justice meted out by the Crimean courts and Prosecutor's Office be halted, abrogate its decision to ban Mejlis, and, in a broader sense, just get off our lands in Crimea and the east of Ukraine.

I would like to be absolutely clear: I am humbled by the sheer magnitude of the attention given by the Security Council to the Ukrainian issue. As a matter of fact, we do not want the Russian aggression against Ukraine to be transformed into yet another item on the Council's agenda where, despite regular debates, we see no tangible progress towards a settlement. Since taking our seat in the Council, the Ukrainian delegation has demonstrated the utmost restraint in bringing up this subject. But as has already been mentioned by the briefers today, the security situation is not improving, and the Minsk agreements are not being implemented. I am here today to provide the international community with the relevant information on the actual state of affairs on the ground and help to create impetus for a genuine political process aimed at finding a sustainable, peaceful solution to the conflict. Ukraine is convinced that it can be settled only on the basis of the Minsk agreements. I would like to emphasize a couple of the most important points.

Since all sides, including Russia, committed to the ceasefire, after some ups and downs the situation along the line of contact has recently deteriorated, as we have heard. Only this week, between 19 and 26 April, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission reported about 500 cases of ceasefire violations by illegal armed groups, indicating that the intensity of fighting was at a level that had not been seen since August 2014, a time when Russian troops massively invaded Ukrainian territory.

Russia's proxies in Donbas are still presenting major obstacles to the ability of the Special Monitoring Mission to access all the areas under their control and to verify the ceasefire and withdrawal of weapons. I would like to remind the Council that full and safe access for the Monitoring Mission throughout Ukraine,

including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border, and the creation of a security area along that border, were stipulated in the original Minsk agreement of September 2014, something that our Russian colleagues have tended to forget recently. The Special Monitoring Mission reported that 95 per cent of all the freedom-of-movement incidents during this period were instigated by militants. Specifically, on 7 April, a Monitoring Mission vehicle was hit by bullets near Snizhne and Mission observers were threatened at gunpoint in the village of Smile. On 9 April, a Monitoring Mission patrol came under militant fire in Zhovanka. On 18 April, in the city of Donetsk, militants threatened to fire on OSCE monitors and detain them, and that is the least of the problems. On 25 April Mr. Zakharchenko, the leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, publicly threatened to shoot OSCE observers if a police mission were deployed in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

We are extremely concerned about the fact that illegal armed groups have continued to shell Ukrainian armed forces' positions and civilian sites, especially in places located near the agreed areas for demining. Despite such provocations, we are fully committed to completing the demining of all the agreed-on priority areas, and we are grateful to the United Nations demining experts planning to help. On a personal note, I recently saw an 11-year-old boy from the small Ukrainian town of Mariupol, in southern Ukraine, who is currently being treated in a Montreal hospital and taken care of by Canada's Ukrainian community. He was on a walk with his brother and a couple of friends and picked up a strange object that cost him three limbs. He is not just recovering in hospital, he does not know yet that he now has no younger brother.

Another serious matter is the restoration of damaged economic and social infrastructure in order to provide livable conditions for local civilians on both sides of the contact line. The repairs of the damaged facilities, including water pipelines, can be done only after we have ensured that the security situation has genuinely de-escalated and provided personal safety guarantees for the repairer personnel. Along with that, we remain deeply concerned about the continuing exacerbation of the humanitarian situation owing to the unwillingness of the illegal armed groups in Donbas to lift their blockade of the activities of the international humanitarian organizations in the region.

After months of negotiations, there are still 120 Ukrainians being held captive in Donbas whom we cannot get out, regardless of the all-for-all formula that appeared to have been agreed on by everybody. Even the International Committee of the Red Cross has not been allowed to visit them, nor has it been permitted to search for some 800 missing persons. Médecins Sans Frontières has been accused of espionage and banned from the region by the Russian proxies, despite the Russian Federation's promise to put additional pressure on the illegal groups to let that international humanitarian organization into the region. Yesterday, we barely managed to get our Vice-Speaker of Parliament into Minsk; she was leading a working group on humanitarian issues of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk but was banned by Russia for five years, a ban that Belarus supported. And this despite the fact that Belarus offered its capital for peace talks. We are carefully collecting the evidence of these crimes, and we will use it later on. One of these collections makes for very bad reading, with a lot of bad pictures, but our delegation will circulate the information.

There are no signs of positive change in the difficult security front, either. Russia has organized and deployed in Donbas a 34,000-strong hybrid military force consisting of regular Russian troops as well as foreign and local militants. Russian generals and military officers are providing direct command-and-control of that illegal military entity, which is impressively heavily armed. Specifically, as of now the terrorists have at least 470 tanks, 870 armoured combat vehicles, 450 tube artillery systems and 190 multiple launch rocket systems, operated by so-called disgruntled miners. That is more than most NATO members have in their regular armed forces, and yet it was allegedly acquired in local hardware stores. The last time I checked, one could hardly buy a decent knife in a hardware store, let alone multiple launch rocket systems and jet flamethrowers — which, by the way, are not to be found in the stores of the Ukrainian armed forces.

We would greatly appreciate it if the Russian Federation would take the lead and kindly offer to safely store their beloved separatists' deadly toys on Russian territory, verifiable by the OSCE, thereby removing another stumbling block in the way of a long-awaited peace, with the aim of showing real interest in the Minsk process and bringing a lifting of the sanctions closer. I do not want take up too much of the Council's

precious time, so our Permanent Mission will be happy to provide members with the information I have here, which will be made available later.

The Russian proxies are systematically ruining the social and economic infrastructure of Donbas, once Ukraine's industrial powerhouse. They are dismantling entire factories and taking them to Russia. Vast reserves of coal in Donbas are also being stolen and transported to Russia. Ukraine has lost more than 20 per cent of its gross domestic product as a result of the Russian aggression. And that is on top of the economic war that the Russian Federation has effectively waged on us by blocking our exports as well as the transit of goods to Central Asian States and China. All of this, I should remind the Council, is in contravention of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, signed in 1994, whereby the signatories promised not to exert economic pressure on Ukraine.

We are totally committed to a political settlement. Our experts have been to Minsk more than 30 times in order to clarify how a political resolution can be achieved and how we can rebuild our ruined economy, revive the region and decentralize our political system. I have no time today to discuss those issues, but I would like to touch on one very key point, the elections, which are not only essential to the peace process but are becoming a reality. We have prepared every piece of the necessary legislation and are ready to discuss their modalities, as our leaders agreed on in Minsk.

What we need, in order to kick-start the election process, in accordance with OSCE standards and in conformity with Ukrainian law, as agreed to by our leaders, is a better security situation on the ground. Let us be reasonable. If there is no security, nobody will hold or observe the elections. President Poroshenko recently proposed deploying a police mission in Donbas, which we believe would help to ensure a safe and secure environment in Donbas, particularly in the context of local elections. The status and mandate of the mission, and its umbrella and composition, can be discussed later. We are open to negotiations and will continue to call on the international community, including the United Nations and OSCE member States, to engage constructively in putting the initiative into practice.

In conclusion, I would again like to draw the Council's attention to the issue of human rights. At least 11 Ukrainian citizens have become political prisoners in Russia. They include a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Nadiya Savchenko, a Ukrainian film-director and native Crimean-Ukrainian citizens. We approved a sanctions list against individuals who took part in mock trials of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, the so-called Savchenko-Sentsov list. We expect that our international partners will join that initiative.

The only thing we are interested in is achieving a lasting, just and fair peaceful solution. That will not be an easy task to accomplish, we know, but anything short of it would be unacceptable to the Ukrainian people, whose best sons and daughters already paid the ultimate price in defending their homeland. We are ready to do our part of the job, but I am afraid that the keys to sustainable de-escalation and a subsequent long-lasting settlement reside in Moscow. It is Moscow that has to produce those keys and open the door to a better, peaceful future without death, hatred or sanctions.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Special Representative in Ukraine of the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine for their briefings. It is important that they were all able to speak today in order to give the Security Council a complete picture of the developments in the situation on the ground on all fronts — political, security, humanitarian and human rights.

For France, a settlement of the crisis in eastern Ukraine remains more vital than ever. Together with Germany, we have continued to work uninterruptedly on mediation within the Normandy format with the aim of achieving a full settlement to the crisis between Ukraine and Russia in accordance with the framework outlined in the Minsk agreements. Our goal continues to be to ensure the restoration of Ukraine's control over all of its internationally recognized territory. That also requires the re-establishment of its authority over Crimea. On that point, our position is consistent with international law and will not change.

Today, we are very concerned about the deteriorating situation on the ground. The increased pace of violations of the ceasefire, which have been observed over several weeks, is accompanied by a human toll that continues to increase, both among the armed fighters and the civilian population. Since the

beginning of April, regrettably, there have been more than 20 deaths and 130 wounded in the Donbas area. That ongoing low-intensity conflict, marked by regular clashes in several localities, is unacceptable. It threatens to undermine the main progress that we had achieved since August, which was the end of large-scale fighting and a decrease in the number of victims. It undermines the credibility of efforts towards ensuring a negotiated settlement. We must therefore do everything to put an end to it. Otherwise, there is a serious risk that we could be heading towards a worsening of the conflict, which would be detrimental to all parties, not just to Ukraine.

As to the substance, the most recent events on the ground serve to further substantiate our conclusion that the Minsk agreements are the sole valid terms of reference for a peaceful, long-term settlement. There is no other solution. We regret, therefore, the fragmentary implementation of those agreements, although they constitute an international commitment in which the provisions must be implemented by all parties. That includes effectively respecting the ceasefire, which is the only possible basis for making progress, as well as implementing other measures provided for under the Minsk agreements, in particular for constitutional reform when it comes to decentralization and a special electoral law for Donbas. Setting out a political horizon is the best way to ensure that the security situation remains stable. Consolidating the security situation and implementing the political dimension of the Minsk agreements are two topics that are at the basis of any lasting settlement, and cannot therefore be decoupled.

Against that disturbing backdrop, we remain more than ever committed, alongside our German partners, to relentlessly pursue our efforts within the Normandy format for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements and to do so without delay. The solutions for progress are well known to us all.

In terms of security, it consists of the effective implementation of the mechanisms discussed at the most recent ministerial meeting in the Normandy format, held in Paris on 3 March, for a consolidation of the ceasefire. Besides the withdrawal of heavy weapons, those include strengthening the role of the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination and setting up a mechanism for preventing and resolving incidents. Moreover, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine should also be able to carry out all of its mandate in an unimpeded and free manner. Threats to its operations and the integrity of its staff are unacceptable.

On the political front, the revival of a positive dynamic depends first and foremost on the early adoption of a law on local elections in Donbas, which should be organized within the context of Ukrainian law and according to OSCE standards. Holding those elections can be envisaged only if there is a stable security environment. In our view, that could be maintained by a complementary international presence on the ground under the auspices of the OSCE. We, together with the German presidency of the OSCE, are currently considering that.

In humanitarian and human rights terms, it is vital that humanitarian organizations immediately enjoy full access, including safe and unimpeded to all territories under separatist control. Unfortunately, that is still not the case. We also recall the commitment made in Paris on 3 March by the parties for the release by 30 April of all prisoners and illegally detained individuals, which in our view includes the case of Nadiya Savchenko. We are concerned about the frequent allegations of violations of human rights in Crimea, especially against the Tatars and pro-Ukrainian militants. In that regard, the decision of the Russian courts to include the Mejlis, the representative assembly of the Crimean Tatars, on the list of extremist organizations is a flagrant violation of the freedom of expression, association and assembly. It is also important that the neutral observation and objective monitoring work being carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other human rights organizations can continue unimpeded throughout Ukrainian territory, including in Crimea.

We are now at a decisive moment. We hope that the parties will assume their full responsibilities to allow the full implementation of the provisions of the Minsk agreements. The inauguration of a new Ukrainian Government, which has publicly demonstrated its intention to make progress on this point, is an important step. Following that, we, together with our German partners, have multiplied our high-level contacts with all parties to revive a dynamic of trust. Those contacts continue as we speak. We call upon all members of the Council to support those efforts in order to collectively speak with one voice. We hope that, at last, sufficient progress will be made in the coming days in order to permit the convening of a new Normandy format ministerial meeting as soon as possible.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank the Minister for his remarks. I join others in welcoming Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, Ambassador Apakan and Ambassador Sajdik back to the Security Council, and I thank them for their sobering briefings today.

As those briefings have told us so clearly, the word ceasefire is losing its meaning in eastern Ukraine. Since the start of 2016, it has been broken thousands of times. Those violations are causing almost daily casualties. Weapons banned under the ceasefire are being put to deadly use on the battlefield. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission personnel, charged with monitoring the ceasefire, are being harassed and threatened, and worse. People are dying, and those in need are going hungry.

To illustrate how empty the word ceasefire has become: just yesterday, tragically, four civilians were killed. And in response to those harrowing deaths in Olenivka, all we have seen is just claim and counter-claim, That is not good enough. All sides have an obligation to uphold the ceasefire. They all have a duty to protect civilians, especially the vulnerable. What we need to see is a real, meaningful commitment to the ceasefire by all sides. That is the only way to stop the killings. That is the only way for the Minsk agreements to succeed. A ceasefire is the bedrock for Minsk. Without it, all the other measures will falter.

All sides have a role to play, but we should be under no illusions as to where the vast majority of responsibility lies. It falls squarely at the door of the Russian-backed separatists. The Special Monitoring Mission has repeatedly made that clear. It is the separatists who are harassing OSCE monitors. It is separatists who risk escalating the febrile situation. And it is the separatists who are receiving troops, equipment and weapons from their Russian allies.

The continued support from the Russian Federation has sustained the instability in eastern Ukraine. Russia's so-called humanitarian convoys cross the border with no regard for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity or independence. They do so without any inspection. We therefore call on Russia to prove that they have nothing to hide and allow international access to those convoys. While Russia's support for the separatists fuelled this crisis, Russia's influence can also bring about a conclusion to the madness. We call on Russia to use its influence for good, to bring the separatists to heel, so that they respect the ceasefire and withdraw banned weapons, so that they allow unhindered access to the Special Monitoring Mission, and so that international humanitarian agencies can finally access all areas of separatist-held territory. It is almost meaningless to discuss any other aspect of Minsk until that has happened.

What we are discussing today — the death, the suffering — these are all the bloody consequence of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea two years ago. That act of aggression went against every treaty, every international commitment, that Russia has ever made. It went against all the rules and norms of international behaviour in the modern world. Our position on that act of aggression will never waiver: Russia must return Crimea to Ukraine. Until it does, it will continue to face the consequences of its illegal actions.

Over the past two years, the human rights situation in Crimea has deteriorated. For minorities and political opponents, life under the de facto authorities is now characterized by arrests, ill treatment, torture and intimidation. The Crimean Tartar community has been particularly affected. The banning of their representative institution this week is just the latest in a series of attacks on their community, their organizations and their way of life.

In the light of the evidence found in United Nations and OSCE human rights reporting, it is perhaps unsurprising that Russia has consistently denied access to international human rights organizations, save for the solitary Council of Europe mission in January. One of the recommendations from that mission, which reported back to the Council of Europe Secretary General this month, called on Russia to open up Crimea to international human rights monitoring mechanisms. We repeat that call today. Russia must grant such access to enable a proper assessment of the situation.

Let me conclude with this final point. Through its actions in Crimea and through its support to the separatists, Russia has brought chaos to Ukraine. In that chaos, thousands of lives have been lost, including those four civilians only yesterday. No matter who fired the shells that killed those poor people, it is clear that, without Russia's actions, they would not have been exposed to the horrific violence that claimed their lives. I therefore end by once again calling on Russia to fulfil its commitments under the Minsk agreements and to

allow Ukraine to regain control of its sovereign territory. That can happen only if there is a stable ceasefire.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Broook Zerihoun, Ambassador Apakan and the Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine, Mr. Martin Sajdick, for their informative briefings. I would also like to thank the Ukrainian delegation for calling this essential meeting. We recognize, as I think all members of the Council do, the critically important work that OSCE teams are carrying out in the field, often at significant personal risk — as illustrated by the recent attacks on OSCE monitors. We also note the great work done by United Nations staff — again at significant personnel risk, as evinced by the detention of a United Nations staff member by Russian-backed separatists since 8 April. That staff member should be released immediately and unconditionally.

The Security Council has not met to discuss the situation in Ukraine since December 2015 (see S/PV.7576) — a long stretch by recent standards. It would not be unreasonable to interpret the absence of meetings as a sign, perhaps, that the implementation of the Minsk agreements is advancing. Yet, as we all know, and as we have heard starkly today, that is, sadly, not the case. Over the past several months, the conflict has worsened. Violence has increased, and the challenges to implementation of the Minsk agreements have only increased. Before delving into those discouraging developments, it is important to remind ourselves of the root cause of this crisis.

What is happening today is the result of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which began with its occupation of Crimea more than two years ago. That occupation expanded with substantial military on the ground and weapons support for armed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Every negative consequence of the conflict that we see today — every one — can be traced back to that original sin. We must not lose sight of that incontrovertible fact, even as we focus on the issues and the human consequences in the present.

Let me begin with the situation in eastern Ukraine, where violence along the line of contact has reached its highest levels since the 1 September 2015 ceasefire was declared. According to the most recent report by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, from 25 January to 10 April,

> "the [Mission] recorded 11 consecutive weeks in which the number of recorded ceasefire violations was higher than in any other single week since early September 2015."

On 14 April alone — and this is shocking even by Ukraine standards — the Monitoring Mission recorded more than 4,000 ceasefire violations, some 500 of them on a single day, using heavy weapons that are prohibited under the Minsk agreements.

Just yesterday, as others have noted, we were again reminded of the dreadful human toll of this violence, when an explosion killed four civilians and wounded at least eight more along the line of contact. This cycle of escalation must stop. As the fighting has increased, the unarmed international monitors, whose job it is to document ceasefire violations and to try to de-escalate the violence, have found themselves denied access, threatened and, in some instances, even targeted themselves.

The climate, as has been noted by OSCE colleagues, is a climate of impunity. On 7 April, a Monitoring Mission vehicle that was driving deep into Russian-backed separatist-controlled territory some 60 kilometres from the line of contact came under small arms fire. The same day, in separatist-controlled Luhansk, another such vehicle was blocked by Russian-backed separatist forces. When a monitor stepped out of the vehicle to negotiate their passage, a Russian-backed separatist cocked his rifle and pointed it directly at the monitor. Those are not isolated incidents. According to OSCE reports, separatists have been responsible for more than 90 per cent of incidents in which access has been restricted or denied during this month.

That brings us back to a question we have asked many times before in the Council. When Russia and the separatists it backs have denied impartial monitors and investigators access — from the time of the invasion of Crimea to the inspection of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 crash site — the question is: what do they have to hide? Why are OSCE monitors so scary that one needs to shoot up their car, cock guns at them and impede their movement? What is Russia hiding?

Working to ensure that a comprehensive and sustained ceasefire takes hold along the line of contact, and that OSCE monitors have the full and unfettered

access they need to help monitor that ceasefire, is the sina qua non for the political steps set out in the Minsk agreements. Consider the steps of passing an electoral law and holding free and fair local elections under Ukrainian law and in accordance with OSCE standards. That is of critical importance. We all recognize that. Yet, to hold a democratic election, citizens and election monitors need basic security and basic freedom of movement. Candidates must be able to express their opinions and assemble publicly without fear of violence or reprisals. Yet the climate created by the separatists in the parts of eastern Ukraine that they occupy is not a climate that looks anything like that.

In addition to de-escalating the fighting and allowing full access for international monitors throughout eastern Ukraine, Russia must engage constructively and support serious efforts to propose an election law for areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast, as well as support the steps necessary for an adequate security environment for elections in the Donbas region that meet OSCE standards. Actions such as those, as well as the release of all hostages and detained persons, will help pave the way for further implementation of the Minsk agreements, which should ultimately lead to Russia's withdrawal of all forces and equipment from Ukrainian territory and the restoration of Ukrainian control over its side of the international border.

Pulling back forces and abiding by the ceasefire is also crucial to improving the dire humanitarian situation faced by civilians, who are disproportionately bearing the costs of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, an estimated 3.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the ongoing conflict. Approximately 1 million of those people live along the line of contact or in separatist-controlled territory. Yet they are receiving only a fraction of the aid they need, in large part because Russian-backed separatists expelled most United Nations and international humanitarian organizations in July 2015, and have not allowed them consistent access since.

In a perverse cycle, Russia uses the dire humanitarian situation that it has helped fuel to send its so-called humanitarian convoys across the international border with Ukraine, all the while preventing Ukrainian and international authorities from inspecting those convoys. Once again, if your convoys are filled with food and medicine, why prevent international inspectors from looking inside of them. To that end, we again urge Moscow to honour its commitments in Minsk to ensure that separatists allow the immediate resumption of full humanitarian access.

As the Government of Ukraine seeks to address this Russian-manufactured crisis, it should facilitate the safe movement of civilians and commercial cargo across the contact line. It should keep checkpoints into separatist-controlled territories open, unless closing them is essential to ensuring the security of civilians. And it should find ways consistent with security and administrative requirements to ensure that social, economic and educational benefits are provided to internally displaced persons and other populations, such as older persons and persons with disabilities.

Let me turn to another part of Ukraine, Crimea. It has been more than two years since Russia held its sham referendum, one, we must recall, where the question posed to voters — those who turned out — was to join or leave Ukraine. Some choice. It has been two years since then, as well, that 100 Member States, including the United States, adopted General Assembly resolution 68/262, which underscores that the referendum has no validity and affirms our shared commitment, as stated in paragraph 1, to

> "the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders".

If you want a picture of the way Russian authorities govern on sovereign Ukrainian territory, just look at Crimea today. On Tuesday of this week, the Russian-controlled Supreme Court in Crimea declared the Mejlis, the self-governing body of the Crimean Tartars, an extremist organization. As a result, virtually all forms of Tartar political expression and organization have effectively been criminalized. No more speaking to the press — that is a crime. No more convening meetings — a crime. No more holding elections — a crime. Of course, the Mejlis will be allowed to keep its bank accounts, although now they may be used only to pay taxes and penalties to occupying authorities. On the day of the ruling, Crimea's so-called Chief Prosecutor declared,

> "Today, we build a world in which every Crimean will be safe and joyful".

That is unless one is a Crimean Tartar or another resident who happens to oppose the occupation.

Meanwhile, the crackdown on dissent in Crimea continues to deepen, as the few remaining independent journalists and other critical voices are methodically targeted. On 18 April, a high-ranking Russian justice official argued publicly for passing legislation that would treat questioning the legitimacy of sham Crimea referendum as an "extremist activity", punishable by law. The following day, the homes of at least seven journalists in Crimea were raided by authorities. One of those journalists is now facing up to five years in prison on charges of allegedly "calling for undermining Russian territorial integrity via mass media". In another words, for reporting that Crimea is part of Ukraine, as all United Nations maps show that it is, one is locked up. How is that possible? In Crimea and eastern Ukraine, as in so much of Russia, telling the truth is now an extremist activity. Go figure.

Let me conclude. I began my remarks today by encouraging us all not to lose sight of the root cause of this crisis: Russia's occupation of Crimea and ongoing arming, training and fighting alongside separatists in eastern Ukraine. Just as the root cause of this crisis has not changed, neither has the solution. As has always been the case, the crisis manufactured by Russia can and must be ended by Russia, by stopping its arming, training and fighting alongside separatists in eastern Ukraine and by ending its illegal occupation of Crimea. The Minks agreements offer the only pathway — one agreed upon by all sides — to de-escalate this conflict, to restore peace to Ukraine and to reaffirm the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that undergird all of our collective security. But to implement them, Russia and the separatists whom it supports must fulfil the very first step of abiding by an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and grant full access to OSCE monitors. Together with the Normandy format leaders, the United States will continue to press for their full implementation by all parties, just as we will keep sanctions in place for as long as Russia continues to obstruct their implementation. And we will maintain our Crimea sanctions until Russia ends its occupation of the peninsula.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate. I also thank, the briefers, my good friends Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik. I have had the pleasure of working with both of them here at the United Nations, where they both did excellent work. I also wish to thank the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for joining us in this debate.

Spain believes that the situation in eastern Ukraine continues to be extremely concerning. The information we have just heard from Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Ambassador Apakan only confirm that. Consequently, we want to see the Security Council continue following up accordingly on the development of the conflict in its different aspects and use all tools at its disposal to support the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Normandy format countries, which Spain supports.

Today's information also serves to confirm that we are once again going through a troubling time. Not only is the ceasefire that was called for six months ago not being respected in a sustained and consistent manner, but in recent weeks violations have increased and the number of victims rises daily. Moreover, the other security aspects covered by the Minsk agreements that the Council endorsed in resolution 2202 (2015) are not being applied.

I wish to point out in particular our concern about the lack of progress in connection with demining activities, given the disastrous effect that that has on the civilian population. We are also concerned by the humanitarian situation and what we have heard concerning the human rights situation. In that regard, we have also very carefully read and taken note of the most recent report of the human rights Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

With regard to the political provisions of the agreements, Spain also believes that the main obstacle to moving forward, with respect to them is the lack of stability and minimal security conditions in the Donbas region. The status quo is unsustainable, and maintaining it can lead only to a further worsening of the situation on the ground and, in particular, more suffering on the part of the of the civilian population, which should be a priority in our deliberations when we consider the conflict.

We all know that freezing conflicts does not bring us closer but, on the contrary, moves us farther away from a solution, perpetuating over time their harmful effects. Consequently, we need to redouble our efforts in supporting the Minsk process and the work of the Trilateral Contact Group within the framework of the OSCE, so that we can soon see concrete progress. The Minsk agreements are still the only valid framework

to seeking a political solution to the conflict, which has gone on for far too long. But it is not enough to simply repeat that time and time again, if they are not accompanied by a real and active commitment with regard to the obligations that they entail.

Everyone, including members of the Council, must focus their efforts on their full, immediate and — above all — good-faith implemention of the agreements. By everyone I mean not only the parties who are directly involved, but also especially all of those who have an ability to influence those parties. In that regard, I call once again on Russia in particular, in its dual capacity as member of the Normandy format and as an actor with a great capacity to influence the separatist leaders of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. We condemn the lack of political resolve and commitment that these leaders continue to demonstrate, and in particular the difficulties they repeatedly raise for humanitarian actors, including those of the United Nations. We also condemn the constraints they continue to impose on the full mobility and privileges of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, with occasional recourse to violence. These actions are unjustifiable and unacceptable and must end.

I cannot conclude without recalling once again the content of General Assembly resolution 68/262, which is binding on us all. Spain is firmly convinced that any lasting and sustainable solution must necessarily involve respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and for the human rights of all its inhabitants, including those of Crimea.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I should like to begin by thank the three briefers — Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, Ambassador Apakan and my former colleague, Ambassador Martin Sajdik — for their insightful and sobering briefings.

Japan is deeply concerned by the current situation in Ukraine. The briefings we have just heard confirm our concern. Ukraine may not make headlines these days, but the situation is far from calm and stable. The number of ceasefire violations in Donetsk and Luhansk has been on an upward trend since January. During the week of 11-17 April, nearly 1,000 rounds of mortar fire were recorded — the highest number this year. In March, 20 Ukrainian soldiers were killed. This was the highest number of casualties since August 2015.

We must challenge this deadlock. The answer lies in the Minsk agreements. That document has been agreed to and signed by all the relevant parties. It was also endorsed by resolution 2202 (2015). Japan once again urges all parties to fully and promptly implement the Minsk agreements.

It is a matter of concern that the freedom of movement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission is increasingly restricted. The Special Monitoring Mission has been playing a pivotal role in helping to de-escalate the crisis. Without such restrictions, the Mission could do much more. Japan stresses that the Special Monitoring Mission must be given full and unfettered access throughout the conflict zone, including the entire border region.

Japan strongly believes that the conflict in Ukraine can be solved only by diplomatic means and in full respect for international law, especially the legal obligation to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

In closing, I wish to confirm that Japan, as Chair of the Group of Seven Ukraine Support Group and as one of the largest donors to Ukraine, remains committed to supporting Ukraine's efforts for reform.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I should like to begin by thanking Ukraine for calling for this debate and to welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs to our meeting. I also want to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their briefings.

In February 2015, the Council endorsed the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which laid out a number of agreed steps aimed at ending hostilities, alleviating humanitarian suffering and establishing a path towards resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Yet more than a year later, none of these measures has been implemented fully. Even the first and most basic of the agreed measures — an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire — is routinely violated. Worryingly, these violations have increased in intensity in recent weeks. The second agreed measure — the withdrawal of heavy weapons — has also not been fully implemented. Recent reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) highlight the use of artillery, mortars and tanks, all of which were supposed to have been pulled back from the contact line over year ago.

The situation is deeply troubling. Given the abundance of arms in the separatist-controlled regions, there is a real risk of further violent escalation. The persistent violence has caused the deaths of thousands of people, with tens of thousands more injured. Essential civilian infrastructure has been damaged and cannot be repaired amidst flying bullets and falling shells. More than 1.5 million people are internally displaced.

Beyond the terrible human costs, the failure to stabilize the security situation has also made progressing other aspects of the Minsk agreements much more difficult. We call on the parties to honour their commitments and implement all aspects of the Minsk agreements. This is the best path towards a stable and lasting peace. As a matter of priority, all parties must deliver on their commitment to a genuine ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons, monitored and verified by the OSCE. We reiterate our call on Russia to use its influence over the separatists to ensure that they implement commitments made in Minsk.

The OSCE has a critical role to play in verifying implementation. It is therefore of real concern that OSCE monitors continue to face significant constraints on access and movement in areas under separatist control, including along most of the Ukrainian border that remains under separatist control. Again, we urge Russia to use its influence over the separatists to ensure that OSCE monitors can effectively and safely fulfil their responsibilities under the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We condemn recent aggressive acts against OSCE monitors in separatist-controlled areas, including being fired upon and threatened at gunpoint. Such actions must be repudiated by all sides.

On the political aspects of the Minsk agreements, we need to see faster progress. Reaching agreement on modalities for elections — which are to be held in accordance with relevant OSCE standards, monitored by the OSCE and in a secure, stable environment — is a priority. Discussions in the Trilateral Contact Group and Normandy format need to be approached in good faith and with a determined focus on problem-solving. We hope that practical steps can be agreed in order to break the current impasse.

We must not lose sight of the ongoing suffering of the civilians caught up in this conflict and its aftermath. The humanitarian challenges flowing from the crisis in Ukraine continue to affect the lives of millions. Huge numbers of Ukrainians face daily challenges accessing basic necessities, including food and water. All sides need to intensify their efforts to ensure that support reaches civilians in affected areas and those that have been displaced by the violence. Ultimately, however, the lives of civilians will be best protected through full implementation of the Minsk Agreements and the restoration of peace.

Lastly, let me reiterate New Zealand's rejection of Russia's annexation of Crimea, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Organization.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join my other colleagues in expressing our appreciation to the briefers for their comprehensive assessments of the latest situation in Ukraine. My delegation acknowledges the presence of the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine at today's meeting.

Over one year after the signing of the Minsk II agreement and its endorsement by the Council via resolution 2202 (2015), we need to examine how much progress had been made in its implementation. Listening to the briefers, it is obvious that much more need to be done.

Malaysia is deeply concerned by the daily violations of the ceasefire. The recent escalation in violence in eastern Ukraine and the missing weapons from the storage sites detected by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission are alarming signs, and we hope do not indicate for the direction in which we are heading. While we welcome the progress made to date in implementing the Minsk agreements, such as the exchange of prisoners and on constitutional reform, we wish to see more efforts towards the holding of local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk, in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, the reinstatement of full border control by Ukraine and the withdrawal of all foreign military personnel, mercenaries and military equipment from Ukraine's territory.

We reiterate our call on the parties to cooperate fully with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to enable its personnel to carry out their mandate, including by providing full and unhindered access to the OSCE to rebels-held areas in the Donbas region and the requisite information to enable the OSCE to verify the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Any threats to the security and safety of the OSCE personnel and

obstructions that prevent them from fulfilling their mandate are unacceptable. The recent capture of a United Nations staff member by the separatists is a cause of great concern, and we urge his immediate and safe release.

On the humanitarian situation, we remind the parties to honour their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, particularly on the protection of civilians. Malaysia urges all parties to allow safe and unrestricted humanitarian access to those in need. We reiterate our position that humanitarian assistance must be carried out, in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We reiterate the need for a peaceful political solution to the conflict, based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We commend the hard work of the OSCE and the Trilateral Contact Group in Ukraine, and we urge the relevant parties to intensify cooperation through those frameworks in good faith.

In conclusion, we urgently need to break the current deadlock and to halt the downward spiral in implementing the Minsk agreements. Every effort must be made to uphold and stabilize the ceasefire and build trust through confidence-building measures. Malaysia therefore urges both sides to renew their commitment, engage in good faith and redouble their efforts to fully implement the provisions of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, as well as Ambassador Apakan and Ambassador Sejdik for their comprehensive briefings to the Security Council on the developments in Ukraine and on the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We would also like to welcome Mr. Vadym Prystaiko, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Egypt has always stressed the need to intensify international efforts to reach a lasting political solution to the crisis in Ukraine, a solution that would bring security and stability in Ukraine, according to the Minsk agreements. Egypt believes that those agreements are the best framework for reaching a lasting and sustainable settlement to the conflict raging in the country.

Security Council resolution 2202 (2015) calls on all the parties to implement a package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, especially those related to the commitment to a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the adoption of necessary constitutional reforms and the holding of local elections in Donbas. The package also calls for addressing the humanitarian implications of the conflict, in coordination with all the relevant parties without exception.

Egypt expresses its deep concern over the meagre progress on those fronts. We urge all parties to comply fully with their commitments under the Minsk agreements. We call on all parties to engage in the dialogue process and to work towards a peaceful solution that meets the aspirations of the people of the region.

As the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in Donbas, Egypt stresses the vital need of ensuring humanitarian access to all affected areas to improve the life of citizens. Egypt calls on all parties to exercise self-restraint and to implement fully the Minks agreements and the ceasefire for the benefit of the peoples of the region. Egypt will continue to support all efforts to reach a political settlement to this crisis. We commend the ongoing efforts at dialogue under the Normandy format and by other international partners to that end.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to thank the delegation of Ukraine for bringing this item to the attention of the Security Council, and also for the presence of Mr. Vadym Prystaiko, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. We would also like to thank Mr. Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Ambassadors Apakan and Sejdik for their briefings.

Our country has been following with concern the recent events in eastern Ukraine, as well as the recent ceasefire violations. We regret that, two years after the conflict began, hostilities have again intensified in recent months, and we are concerned by the reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine with respect to the presence of heavy weapons, tanks and artillery systems on both sides of the contact line in the security zone in eastern Ukraine. In that regard,

we believe it is crucial to increase efforts and step up dialogue in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Minsk agreements. We understand that is the appropriate way to find a political and peaceful solution to the conflict. In that spirit, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2202 (2015). We urge the parties to comply with their obligations under the agreements and thereby achieve the objective of the ceasefire.

Similarly, Uruguay calls upon the parties to ensure the effective protection of human rights of the residents of the entire region, in particular the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. We believe that it is crucial for the parties to the conflict to respect international law and international humanitarian law in all circumstances. That is essentail in order to address the situation of internally displaced persons and persons who require humanitarian assistance, in particular in terms of protection, continuous supply of water and food, emergency supplies and other critical services. It is also crucial to guarantee access to humanitarian organizations to the affected areas, and also to guarantee the free and safe circulation of civilians through the contact line.

Uruguay recognizes the important work done by the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE in Ukraine, and we believe that it is essential that the Mission be allowed access to all areas of the conflict zone in order to fulfil its mandate.

Lastly, my country hopes that the challenges in implementing the Minsk agreements can be overcome and that existing differences can be settled exclusively through peaceful means, through dialogue among the parties and full respect for international law and democratic values.

Mr. Toro-Carnevali (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to welcome the presence of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, and Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has on many occasions expressed its strict adherence to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, wherein the peaceful settlement of disputes and direct dialogue between the parties are an essential component. That is why we reiterate our conviction that the full implementation of resolution 2202 (2015), in support of the decision by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany on 12 February 2015 in Minsk, is the fundamental basis for the consolidation of efforts to encourage the parties to work together towards a political and peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis. In that context, our country considers the ongoing work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in support of the effective implementation of the Minsk agreements to be a positive step forward and has been following the recent violent events in the Donbas region with great attention.

On 5 April 2016, the representatives of the countries of the Minsk Group of the OSCE condemned the resurgence of violence and further stated that "there is no military solution to the conflict". Also, the joint statement after the ministerial meeting of the OSCE Troika on 12 April expressed

> "deep concern at reports of increasing numbers of violations of the ceasefire and the presence of heavy weapons in the area security in eastern Ukraine".

Furthermore, they rejected the incidents involving the monitors of the Special Monitoring Mission.

Venezuela remains convinced that a military escalation and spread of the conflict should be avoided, for which the support of the international community and strict compliance with the Minsk agreements and resolutions of the Council are required. All parties should continue working to address the structural causes of the crisis, in order to achieve a firm and lasting peace. Any effort to manage the situation will succeed as long as there is dialogue and support for direct negotiations, and the parties show political will using the Minsk agreements as a guide.

Venezuela is convinced and has argued in various forums of the Organization that the application of unilateral coercive sanctions are contrary to international law. In that context, we believe that the current sanctions are counterproductive to the desire for peace and stability in the region and are eroding the climate for dialogue necessary to restoring trust between the parties.

In any conflict, civilians are the most affected by violence. We therefore call upon the parties to strictly abide by the obligations relating to their protection, including the need to ensure access for humanitarian assistance to residents, internally displaced persons and refugees in the affected areas. We reject violence,

ethnic and political persecution and acts of terrorism, regardless of who commits them. Any incident should be independently investigated, with evidence being provided to support the conclusions of such investigations.

Finally, we call on all parties to work with conviction in efforts to achieve a just and lasting political solution that is in their own interest and in that of the entire region.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Chief Monitor of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, and the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office in Ukraine, Ambassador Martin Sajdik, for their briefings. We also welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to this meeting.

After a period of calm, with a ceasefire holding since the last quarter of 2015, violence has returned to the east of Ukraine, marking the end of a period of hope for better days in the country. Deaths of civilians, disappearances, violations of women's rights, displacement of people, humanitarian crises and human misery will again become realities of life in eastern Ukraine unless a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities are not reinstated in earnest.

We reiterate our support for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which were endorsed by the Security Council through resolution 2202 (2015), and for a permanent ceasefire, as the prerequisites for the speedy implementation of the Minsk agreements' package of measures and ultimately the establishment of a durable and sustainable peace in Ukraine.

We are deeply concerned by the worsening conflict in eastern Ukraine. Reports of increasing ceasefire violations, mainly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, are matters of concern. We regret the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of the Special Monitoring Mission and express our total disapproval that heavy weapons previously withdrawn from the front lines are missing from the permanent storage sites and are being used by the belligerents. Also of concern is the situation of internally displaced persons as a consequence of the reported incidents, while humanitarian access is increasingly restricted and serious security incidents are being reported.

We regret constraints on humanitarian access and urge all parties to the conflict to facilitate the safe, rapid and unimpeded access by humanitarian organizations to the areas and people in need. Once again, we call for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of all heavy weapons and the full implementation of the Minsk agreement's package of measures. We furthermore call for full access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and for monitoring and verifying compliance with the Minsk agreements and urge strict respect for international commitments agreed under international guarantees so that the people of Ukraine are allowed to live in peace, freedom and security.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and negotiations and strict respect for the principles of international law and the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks you, Mr. President, for organizing today's briefing. I would also like to welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to the Council.

The outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine two years ago testifies to the seriousness of the issue of conflict prevention, the Security Council's responsibility for the maintenance of peace and how urgent it is that we step up its efforts in that regard. That was why my delegation welcomed the meeting the Council held in this Chamber in February (see S/PV.7635) with Mr. Franz-Walter Steinmeier, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), one of whose priorities, rightly, is the crisis in Ukraine, with the triple goal of renewing dialogue, re-establishing confidence and restoring security.

That is why my delegation, which continues to be deeply concerned about the reports of repeated violations of the ceasefire, would like to recall Senegal's commitment to promoting dialogue and international cooperation as means to help resolve disputes. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm my country's support for the Minsk agreements, signed in September 2014 and finalized in February 2015, which constitute a solid basis for reaching a sustainable and credible political solution to the situation in eastern Ukraine. It is therefore vital that the parties join their efforts, with the support of the negotiating frameworks already in place, with the aim of fostering a climate conducive to

the diplomatic solution that we all want. In that regard, we should support the efforts that have already been made to reduce tensions and promote peace, stability and security, as well as to facilitate dialogue among the authorities, civil society and ethnic and religious groups.

We hope that the various initiatives will contribute to stabilizing the ceasefire more effectively, ensuring the withdrawal of heavy weapons and solidifying a national dialogue, in accordance with the Minsk agreements and within the framework of the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine. In that context, I would like to emphasize the importance of the extension by the Permanent Council of the OSCE of the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine to 31 March 2017. Given the Monitoring Mission's impact on the de-escalation and withdrawal of weapons, we believe that the OSCE monitors should continue to benefit from free access to the area in order to better fulfil their role and ensure the effective implementation of the Minsk agreements, particularly the ceasefire. Bearing in mind the importance of establishing credible and legitimate institutions in the current situation, it seems equally crucial to make appropriate arrangements for the holding of local elections in accordance with the provisions of the Minsk agreements.

I would like to conclude by urging the parties to renew their commitment to dialogue and by assuring them of Senegal's full support in their efforts to reach a negotiated and sustainable political solution.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to warmly welcome our former colleagues, Mr. Ertuğrul Apakan and Mr. Martin Sajdik, who have undertaken a very difficult task and for whose efforts we are very grateful. And of course I would like to thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

The extremely grave crisis in Ukraine sparked by a coup d'état actively supported from outside the country has now lasted two and a half years. Today, astonishingly, the Permanent Representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom have attempted to tie the start of the crisis to the unification of Crimea with Russia. There is no need to distort the facts. They will not succeed in covering up their blame for the crisis. At the moment Crimea is an island of stability by comparison with Donbas in former Ukraine.

For the duration of the crisis in Ukraine, the Security Council has unfortunately been used as a platform for propaganda. The single, although very significant, achievement within the walls of this Chamber was the adoption of resolution 2202 (2015), which approved the package of measures agreed to on 12 February 2015. In adopting that resolution, the Council took on the political responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the package. That is what we must focus on. In our conversations, some of our Western colleagues have admitted that Kyiv is not implementing it. But they also say that, while President Poroshenko personally agreed to the document in Minsk, he does not have sufficient political clout to implement its provisions. We do not accept such explanations. Why did the current Ukrainian leaders seize power through a coup d'état if they were not capable of governing their country?

We will be keeping a close watch on the behaviour of the new Ukrainian Government. Mr. Yatsenyuk, who was well known for his bellicose statements, has resigned as Prime Minister. It appears that there are no serious differences between the President and the new Prime Minister and that the latter does intend to implement reforms. But it seems clear that there can be no question of reform succeeding until the bloody conflict is settled and until Ukrainian society comes together and rejects its hostile ideology of extreme nationalism.

In that context, we were interested in the Ukrainian delegation's proposal to hold this Security Council meeting today, particularly since President Poroshenko announced that this was done on his personal initiative. We need to know what the new power structure in Kyiv has to say about its intentions with regard to implementing the Minsk agreements. That is particularly the case in view of the fact that before proposing that initiative, the Kyiv authorities, as usual, consulted Washington, and an assistant to the Secretary of State visited Kyiv. In their bilateral contacts, our American partners have said that they would like to make a constructive contribution to settling the crisis in Ukraine and would even like to join the Normandy format. In practice, however, as we have seen more than once, their interactions with Kyiv have the opposite effect, leading to a radicalization of the Ukrainian authorities' positions and increasingly aggressive rhetoric on their part. Now this has happened again. With policies such as these, based on a hidden agenda, Washington is undermining trust in its actions, and, as

everyone knows, not just in Ukraine but in many other cases. The statement made today by the United States representative is yet another example of that policy. And today's statement by the representative of Ukraine was deeply disappointing, with a lot of provocative rhetoric and twisting of the facts but zero concrete plans for implementing the Minsk agreements.

The tasks facing Kyiv in implementing the package of measures are very clear. The political triad is crucial. First, it involves changing Ukraine's Constitution and enacting a permanent law on special status for Donbas. Secondly, it has to include the enactment of a law on elections in Donetsk and Luhansk in agreement with their representatives. Thirdly, it has to settle the problem of amnesty in connection with the events that have occurred in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. None of those issues has been resolved. Kyiv continues to refuse to conduct a direct dialogue with the Donbas representatives or to agree with them on the steps to be taken, as provided for in the Minsk agreement. In Kyiv they love to say that it is Russia that is not implementing the package of measures. But it is not we who have to enact all these laws, it is the Verkhovna Rada, and it is not we who have to put them into effect, it is the President of Ukraine. It is perfectly clear that they are simply looking to shift the blame for their problems and make it somebody else's headache.

We are always hearing from Kyiv that the main obstacle to solving the fundamental problems with the settlement is the instability of the ceasefire. However, if we consider it logically and carefully compare the facts of the reports of the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), it becomes clear whose interests are served by constantly stirring up the situation on the contact line. It is no accident that the Ukrainian authorities are constantly putting out new ideas either about deploying peacekeeping forces or sending in police with heavy weapons. That is, after all, a very convenient way to proceed: first deliberately fan tensions, and then offer solutions that are unrelated to reality. The sole objective is to play for time and to distract attention from the non-implementation of the Minsk agreements. We are concerned about reports with regard to the worsening situation in the conflict zone in Donbas. The situation began to heat up in December 2015, particularly after Ukrainian armed forces began to occupy towns in the neutral strip. On some occasions, they even crossed the contact line as defined by the Minsk agreements. We view those acts as very dangerous and provocative.

Ukrainian forces must pull out of those towns. That assessment is supported by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. On 17 April, the representatives of the Ukrainian forces, in discussion with OSCE observers, did not hide their intention to occupy new territories in the south-east. The number of violations of the ceasefire have recently been equal to those in the heated period of the summer of 2015. On some days, there have been up to 4,000 such violations. OSCE statistics indicate that the Ukrainian side is the side that is most responsible for those violations. From 4 to 21 April, the Special Monitoring Mission noted a threefold increase in Ukrainian heavy weapons in the security zone. The most recent report states that only 9 per cent of the declared Ukrainian weapons remain in their storehouses. A significant portion of the missing weapons can be found in the forward positions of the Ukrainian forces. They have continued to use heavy weapons against Donbas towns. As a result, they are destroying houses, and civilians are suffering.

Yesterday, the Ukrainian forces, armed with 120-mm weapons, shelled the checkpoint and crossing point of Olenivka. Four civilians were killed, including a pregnant woman. Our British colleague said that he does not care who is shooting, but it matters to us. There was a meeting today of the Permanent Council of the OSCE to consider specific measures to improve the security situation. We need to have a permanent presence of OSCE observers in there, and we must get Kyiv to remove the serious constraints on their movements. We must also monitor the weapon storehouses, and, if necessary, put in surveillance cameras there and in the most dangerous sectors. We must also have "mirror" patrols, not only on all of the territory of the Donbas region, but also in the rear guard of the Ukrainian army. We must step up our efforts to ensure local ceasefires, and we need to have a Joint Control Coordination Centre whose patrols are manned by representatives of the armed forces involved. We must have direct contacts between the various sections. All those measures could seriously reduce the number of incidents.

However, it is remains clear, as has been seen in many regional crises throughout the world, that maintaining a ceasefire without resolving the political problems is impossible. Instead of promoting national reconciliation by implementing the Minsk agreements, Ukraine continues its witch hunts and efforts to prepare

for war. The latest example of that trend, instead of the needed reforms, is the decision to set up a ministry to deal with "anti-terrorist operations" in the "occupied territories". Ukraine has persisted in calling the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk separatists, despite the fact that those representatives signed the Minsk agreements and demonstrated their willingness to continue to live in a Ukrainian State. An economic blockade remains in place on Donbas. All dissidents are being called terrorists and separatists, and they are being persecuted in all kinds of ways.

The standard operating procedure for those in power in Kyiv has been torture and abuse of individuals, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial punishment, much of which has been cited by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, but the Western patrons of human rights prefer not to talk about that. The American and British Permanent Representatives have tried again today to slander our humanitarian convoys into Donbas. From the very beginning, we called upon the Ukrainian Administration to organize monitoring at the border, but Kyiv refused. They have also refused permission to international entities to carry out such inspections. Generating cheap propaganda is preferable, it would seem, to relieving the suffering of the people of Ukraine.

Today, it is not possible to forget the tragic date, 2 May 2014, when, two years ago, 48 people were burned alive in Odessa and more than 200 were injured. No one has been punished for that crime. The Council of Europe Office in Ukraine has stated that the investigation carried out by the Ukrainian authorities does not meet the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular the requirements of independence, effectiveness, thoroughness and timeliness. We call upon members of the Security Council not to forget that tragic event. It is important to establish the truth and to bring those responsible to justice.

In that context, we can only feel disgust at the recent appointment to the speakership of the Ukrainian Parliament, the Supreme Rada, of the odious person known as the "Commander of the Maidan", who, according to many witnesses, participated in the provocative shooting by snipers, both in Kyiv during the coup and in Odessa. It is not surprising that, when he assumed that post, he proposed in Parliament that they should remove the paragraph on the special status of Donbas from the draft bill on changing the Constitution. The recent meeting between him and a high-level representative from Washington, D.C., again reminds us of the mechanism behind those bloody events.

In conclusion, I should like to again stress that what is extremely important today is to implement the package of measures on the Minsk agreements, as well as the strict, consistent and full implementation of the provisions of those agreements. It is the only way forward for settling the conflict in Donbas and for resolving all related problems.

That concludes the main part of my statement. Now, if I may be allowed, I would like to make two brief comments.

As the Council is aware, we were not here to discuss the issue of Crimea. That is because that is a domestic affair of the Russian Federation. But since the issue was raised, I would like to comment. Indeed, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars was banned by Russia because of their extremist activities. In some countries, after not enough attention was paid to dealing with extremists, we can see what serious consequences that has wrought. We will not repeat that mistake. The reality is that, during recent times, there has been a new wave of movement of members of Crimean Tatars to Russian Crimea. We have seen more then 1,000 requests from Uzbekistan alone, for example, which have been accepted.

Kyiv should concern itself not about the Tatars in Crimea but about Donbas, where heavy weaponry and tanks have been attacking the civilian population, their homes, schools and hospitals. The civilian population is also under an economic blockade and their social benefits and pensions have been cut off. Kyiv on a daily basis is jeopardizing the people's rights to health and to their very lives. We note that, in recent years in Ukraine, they banned the Communist Party and many other parties. They have also suppressed civil society groups and people's access to the media. In addition, they have seized and destroyed Orthodox churches and monasteries under the Moscow Patriarch. The Parliament has a draft bill aimed at banning the activities of that Church in Ukraine, although 12,000 people are members of that Church. Such a campaign could be compared, say, to efforts in a Catholic country to ban the Catholic Church, for example, because they did not like that Church. Therefore, our Ukrainian colleagues and others who are selective human rights activists should not preach sermons to us.

Now another minor comment, if I may. Mr. Sajdik in his statement said something that seemed rather

strange to me. He said he requires an answer to the issue of Kyiv's control over its borders. But the answer to that can be found in paragraphs 9 and 11 of the Minsk agreements' package of measures, which clearly state that, after elections are held and the new Constitution is adopted, Ukraine will then regain control over its border. There are eight paragraphs that deal with what exactly should figure in the Constitution about the special status of eastern Ukraine, Donbas. The answers are there. We must work in line with the provisions of the agreements and draw up laws in consultation with the representatives of the regions concerned. The Ukrainian authorities do not want to do that, insisting on restoring what they refer to as their territorial sovereignty and control, all of which is a cause for serious concern.

I have a further point. A very important fact has been communicated to me. When I spoke about the increased presence of Ukrainian armed forces on the contact line, this is what I said: the most recent report of the Special Monitoring Mission noted that Ukrainian storehouses account for just 9 per cent of the arms stock. Most of the rest of those weapons can be found in front-line positions, which demonstrates the position of Kyiv with regard to a peaceful settlement in the Donbas.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, as well as Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their respective briefings.

China has been following the situation in eastern Ukraine closely, and is concerned about the recurring hostilities. We have taken note that the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group recently held multiple consultations on the implementation of the Minsk agreement. We have also noted that the ceasefire and other issues were discussed at the meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs in the Normandy format.

Last year, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2202 (2015), endorsing the Minsk agreement and demonstrating the Council's firm support for a political solution to the question of Ukraine. All parties must faithfully enforce the cessation of hostilities and violence and implement the Minsk agreement. They must also remain committed to seeking a comprehensive, lasting, balanced and long-term solution to the question of Ukraine through dialogue and consultation. Furthermore, that solution should address the underlying causes of the issue and should fully accommodate the legitimate rights, interests and aspirations of all regions and communities in Ukraine. It also must give equal importance to addressing all warranted concerns so as to achieve a balance of all interests. China calls on all the parties concerned to exercise restraint and to work relentlessly towards a political settlement and the realization of peace, stability and development in Ukraine in order to promote both intercommunal harmony, as well as the peaceful coexistence of Ukraine and other countries.

The international community should continue to support all diplomatic efforts towards seeking a political solution. Council discussions should contribute to the easing of tensions on the ground and the proper resolution of the question of Ukraine.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Ambassador Apakan to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Apakan: I wish to thank the Security Council for giving us this opportunity to address it.

The implementation of the Minsk agreements is important. From the security prospective, however, the first, second and the third provisions of the Minsk agreements are very much related to the ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and addendum-proscribed weapons.

We hope to re-instate the ceasefire in the coming days. We believe that will give us space to pursue disengagement, de-escalation and confidence-building measures on the contact line. It will also provide space to speed up demining efforts in priority areas. I hope that will also give us an opportunity to engage in more ceasefire mediation on the contact line. The Council's support for the ceasefire and for the security of the contact line will also pave the way for progress in other areas, in particular the humanitarian, economic and political fronts.

Thank you again, Sir, for enabling us to participate in this meeting.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to Ambassador Sajdik to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Sajdik: Like Ambassador Apakan, I would like to express my gratitude for having been invited to brief the Security Council on the situation in eastern Ukraine.

I understand that there are high expectations, as well as a certain impatience with the state of affairs. There are high expectations in terms of scaling up the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and the four working groups. I will certainly pass on that message of the expectations and the feeling of impatience at the next meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group, which will take place tomorrow in Minsk.

As Ambassador Apakan said, we very much hope that at tomorrow's meeting we will be able to again establish a ceasefire on the occasion of the Orthodox Easter holiday, which falls on this weekend. The ceasefire should not be limited to that holiday, but endure, restoring the hope of the civilian population in the areas of eastern Ukraine that they will see a brighter future. I can only reiterate that I will do everything in my power to fully implement the 12 February 2015 Minsk agreement, and to ensure that the agreement works better than it has thus far.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Russian Federation has requested the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, it seems very important to me that Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik take away from this meeting the impetus to step up the implementation of the package of measures of the February 2015 Minsk agreements.

However, I would like to talk about something slightly different. It is not fully clear to us why the Ukrainian leadership initiated today's meeting. Nothing constructive in terms of internationalmplementing the package of measures has been heard from the Ukrainian side. Now, if it was their intention to exacerbate tensions in order to launch a new military operation, we believe that such a calculation has not been justified. We have heard much here in terms of common sense and good ideas, and we hope that the Ukrainian Government will listen. They must stop the fighting and the shooting and deal with the political settlement in a serious manner.

In that regard, we have heard it said that the Minsk Agreements should be implemented; however, in the spirit of transparency, that should be put down on paper. Over 24 hours ago, we drafted a press statement for adoption by the Security Council. Every member of the Security Council should already have the document, but I would like it to be circulated here once more, as I wish to address it.

In the 24 hours since the draft was circulated, only one delegation — the Ukrainian delegation — has provided us with feedback. They said that the text was unacceptable, but did not say why. Now, I would like to have all members of the Security Council take a look at the text so that we can adopt it. Although it is very brief, it does contain two very important dimensions of the situation. The most important is, of course, the implementation of the Minsk greements. I will read out the draft press statement.

> "The members of the Security Council recalled its resolution 2202 (2015), which endorsed the 'Package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements', adopted and signed in Minsk on 12 February 2015, and called once again for the full implementation of the package as soon as possible."

I would like to recall that paragraph 1 in the package of measures calls for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. Much was said about that today, and many expressed concern about the situation in that regard. Such an appeal would be very appropriate at this stage.

With regard to the second paragraph, it will soon be the second anniversary of the tragic events in Odessa. As we have said, the investigation called for has not been undertaken, and in Odessa there is much tension in connection with that issue. There are statements that various measures will be taken. The so called volunteer battalions, including Azov battalion and other units which are known for their atrocities in eastern Ukraine, are being brought to the city of Odessa, and we would like the Security Council to take some action, at least, confirm the need to conduct an investigation, which would perhaps calm the situation. Accordingly, we have proposed the following second paragraph in our draft press statement:

> "The members of the Security Council also recalled the tragic events in Odessa, Ukraine, on 2 May 2014, when dozens of civilians were killed and hundreds were injured. They underlined the need to speed up the investigation, while ensuring its objectivity and impartiality, in order to bring perpetrators of this reprehensible act to justice."

We have drafted the text in such a manner that it would be impossible to protest the elements contained therein. I would therefore call on our Ukrainian colleagues to show some understanding of the current situation, which is expected of them by many people, including Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sajdik, with respect to the realization of the package of measures. How can they have any objection to the text? We fully do not understand, and we would therefore propose, in a spirit of transparency, a vote on this draft text, so that the President of the Security Council could read it to the press at the end of our meeting.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Prystaiko (Ukraine): I sincerely thank all members of the Security Council for giving me a chance to speak today. It has been a very important discussion for Ukraine, and I think that all of us agree, at least, that the Minsk agreements are the only way forward, in their entirety and complexity, starting from the ceasefire and the withdrawal of weapons and foreign troops, inter alia, to the political resolution, the changes in our Constitution and the decentralization of Ukraine. Incidentally, Ukraine has already started the process of decentralization, and the only part that is not decentralized is held by pro-Russian proxies.

With regard to the Russian representative's statement, I am sick and tired, having been in these negotiations for more than two years, of the accusations of a bloody revolt in Ukraine. The statement was full of the usual "Ds": distract, distort and deny. We have heard it all before. I have made a very serious effort to familiarize myself with all of the public statements on this subject made by the Russian representative up to now. They add up to 84 pages that are worth reading. Most of the elements are well-formulated and resemble the truth, but only if one allows oneself to forget one principal thing: who came into whose land? Who appropriated the land? Who started killing people? Who sent in additional tanks and mercenaries?

With regard to the draft press statement proposed by the Russian Federation, there is no issue with regard to the first part, because it represents, as I mentioned earlier, what all of us here believe and what our leaders have confirmed, namely, that we have to support the Normandy format and the Minsk agreements. In connection with the tragic events in Odessa, my native city and not that of the Russian representative, I believe that we have to investigate all of the events there, starting from the Russians' actions in Crimea and their support and incitement that lead to the killing of people, some of whom were burned alive, in numerous Ukrainian cities, using knives and other means that were provided by the Russians. We therefore do not believe that the draft statement represents an honest attempt on the part of the Russian representative to bring those tragic events to our attention, because Russian media have already reported on the draft statement well before we were given a chance to read it.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the United States of America has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): Rather than talk about some hidden agenda of the United States, it is our view that the Russian Federation delegation, and all delegations represented on the Security Council, should work together to re-establish the ceasefire, arrive at a peaceful de-escalation of the crisis and work out a peaceful resolution on the ground.

We have just received a draft press statement with the Russian Federation's suggestion that the Security Council should consider that draft statement on the situation in Ukraine. The United States is ready to engage in a discussion with Council members on a draft that reflects our consensus view of the situation in its entirety. Let us recall the situation. I underscore again that the current crisis in Ukraine is the result of Russia's aggression and violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Meek (United Kingdom): I wish to respond to two particular points that the representative of Russia made in connection with our earlier statement.

First, he made a reference to our comments on Crimea, which, by the way, according to the United Nations, is categorically not a part of Russia. He said that Crimea was a stable peninsula. I would just repeat the words of my country's Permanent Representative in that connection: "grant access to enable a proper assessment of the situation". That is all that we are asking for. Surely, that should be acceptable if Crimea is a stable peninsula.

Secondly, there was a gross misrepresentation of my Permanent Representative's words. Our Russian colleague said that we do not care who fired the shells. What my Permanent Representative said was, "no matter who fired the shells". As the Russian Permanent Representative, who speaks excellent English, knows, the meaning of that is not the same. We are not trying to express indifference. Far from it, the way we raised that point was intended to reinforce our view that responsibility lies on all sides and that they should all work together to try to deliver a solution.

That is what we expect from Russia. If the Russians are serious about finding a solution, no matter what levels of support they are offering to the separatists, they could do much more in order to help the rest of us to understand what is really going on in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. They could do that by agreeing to consider the Ukrainian request for a policing mission as well as how to enlarge and adequately equip the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, particularly along the border.

Finally, turning to the draft press statement, I do not believe that it is a constructive and particularly serious effort. As the Russian Permanent Representative knows full well, and as my American colleague has said, the draft statement does not cover the full picture. Support to separatists is not mentioned; Nadiya Savchenko is not mentioned; the investigation into Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 is not mentioned; and Crimea is not mentioned. We will be happy to engage on the draft, but, as my American colleague said, press statements are agreed by consensus.

The President *(spoke in Chinese)*: The representative of Spain has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Gasso Matoses (Spain) *(spoke in Spanish)*: We have read the draft press statement from the Russian Federation, and we agree with the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom. We are ready to work on a text. However, it does not seem now as though there is enough consensus in the Chamber to adopt the draft press statement as it stands. It appears that there might be agreement on the first paragraph, but not on the entire draft press statement. For Spain, at this time, the Security Council should have a constructive attitude. In any circumstances, any statement that we issue should favour a de-escalation, promote goodwill, advance negotiations — while any action taken separately could be counter productive.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of France has asked or the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): Very briefly, I just wanat to say that the draft press statement submitted to us does not seem to cover the entire subject. Therefore, I believe it would need more work before being adopted.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): A minor point, but I said accurately in Russian what my British colleague said, namely, that he does not care who did the shooting. But we do care. We continue to believe that those who kill civilians should not be left unpunished. So we care very much who did the shooting. But that is not such a substantive detail.

I am more surprised at what our Ukrainian colleague said about the events that took place on 2 May 2014 in Odessa. The more so as he said that Odessa is his native town. An event took place in his native town that shook the whole world. There were many awful events during the crisis — murders and different forms of violence — but that event was a milestone. Forty-eight people were burned to death, as could be seen on television when those who tried to save themselves jumped out of the windows and were shot. Many witnesses, including the television coverage itself, said that the attack was planned, inter alia, by the current speaker of the Verkhovna Rada.

With regard to what happened in Odessa, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine, who was born in Odessa, says that that attack does not require special attention, but, as I have already said, it is possible that an awful tragedy is in the offing and may take place in Odessa on 2 May. He is also indifferent. He wants to see the event in the general context. But our Western colleagues have also only wished to address the general context. Their position is quite characteristic. It is however rather strange for France to do so, as it took part in the elaboration of the package of measures. Throughout this chain of events the only useful thing that we have done, and that we must continue to do in order to settle the conflict, is to implement the package

of measures. But some say that we cannot confirm the package of measures. Our Ukrainian colleague said that he can agree on the first paragraph, but our American and British colleagues cannot. They say that they want to play a constructive role, but if we do not refer to the "aggression", they will not support the document. There is nothing about aggression in the package of measures.

We note that the United States likes to use that term — it has one aggression after another with destructive consequences throughout the world. But no aggression is mentioned in the package of measures. They are again just trying to draw attention away from the serious political and diplomatic work. And the United States says that it wants to be constructive and help us. How can we understand that claim? It is not possible to understand that position. It was repeated again just now. The United States is not even prepared to agree with the first paragraph, which mentions the need to ensure the realization of the package of measures as soon as possible. Why? Because no reference to Crimea is made in that paragraph? Well, that is because the package of measures makes no reference to Crimea either.

It is very clear, as you said, Mr. President, that there is no consensus here. We see exposed the position of some members of the Security Council, in particular our British and the American colleagues. They ought not to claim that they want to participate in a constructive manner. France and Germany will perhaps take part in a constructive way in the implementation of the package of measures, but the others will still be engaged in their demagoguery and hide their roles in all those matters. Here we have come up against one of the main problems, as a result of which the settlement of the crisis has been delayed in the Ukraine.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Prystaiko (Ukraine): I will be brief. I will not add to the attempts to impose more truths, half-truths and lies that members of the Council have been subjected to for quite a long time. If we are going into such details, I would like to bring to the Council's attention, including that of the Russian representative, that when we speak of the so-called Minsk package of measures, we seem to have forgotten about the initial Minsk agreement, which was signed almost half a year ago. Why have we forgotten about it? Because the Russian Federation all the time refers only to the Minsk agreement of 12 February. I must remind the Council that the original Minsk agreement mentions the special security area along the Ukrainian corridor monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. If the Russian Federation is so fearful that the Ukrainian forces will regain control over the territory of Ukraine, I must remind the representative of the Russian Federation that the idea, which was supported by everyone, was that Ukrainian territory should be returned to Ukraine. But before that, the area around the Ukrainian-Russian border should be placed under the monitoring and verification of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, thereby preventing more weapons and more mercenaries from entering our territory, a practice that we have repeatedly brought to the attention of the Council.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): With regard to border control, I just spoke about that when I was talking about Mr. Sadjik's comments. Ukraine is delaying everything with regard to control of the borders. It is very clearly written in the agreement. The representative of Ukraine has probably read it. Let me read it. It says that the restoration of full control of the borders by Ukraine should begin on the first day after local elections and be completed with a comprehensive political settlement with the implementation of article 11, which states that consultations should take place and an agreement made with the various representatives of the districts in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Ukraine has not consulted with representatives of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Ukraine is not implementing article 11, which talks about constitutional reform and about consultations with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. This should, furthermore, be done in accordance with the note in the document, which contains eight paragraphs on what the special status of these areas of Ukraine should be.

Once again, I apologize for another comment. I'd like to see the draft statement adopted, which, as I understand it, could be acceptable to the Ukrainian delegation, but then the representative of Ukraine began talking about who started the killing, pointing a finger at Russia. Those responsible were those who sought to overthrow the regime. Around 16 February.

they started to shoot policemen, and they were the same persons as those who were throwing Molotov cocktails for several weeks before. They were the ones who began the killing. The Kyiv authorities are not investigating those situations because they want to hide the real truth behind the coup d'état. Snipers were firing against their own people and against demonstrators, which created the conditions for the political coup d'état.

With regard to a final point about the earlier Minsk agreement, many documents have existed: first, there was the agreement of 21 February 2014, which would have enabled us to avoid the entire crisis. Subsequently, a very good statement was issued with the participation of the United States of America, a four-party statement, on 17 April 2014, and it included an inclusive political dialogue, but all of that was subsequently violated. The 30 September 2014 agreement was not signed. Therefore, we came up with a package of measures. That must be respected. We hope that the appeal that was made by Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sadjik with regard to the need to respect the package of measures will be listened to. Let us not find ourselves having to deal with some new military adventures, because the situation along the line of contact gives cause for concern. It can be seen that some form of military adventurism might be under way. We must avoid such a situation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representatiave of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Prystaiko (Ukraine): I promise, Mr. President, that this will be my last statement. The Russian representative was recalling yet another detail of our long and bloody conflict. The so-called agreements of 21 February — which he just cited — were made possible with help of the four parties. But the representative of the Russian Federation has chosen not to remember the fourth party — Russia was at the table. Although three members of the international negotiating team helped Ukraine, the opposition and the President to sign the agreement, the Russian representative was the only party who did not sign the document. Obviously, he was not happy with the agreement between the opposition and then President, Mr. Yanukovych.

In that regard, I have to remind the Council that the official medal that was produced by the Russian Federation for the so-called return of Crimea has the dates on it, starting with 20 February, which is the day before that agreement was brought to the attention of the Security Council by the representative of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the Russian Federation started — not just planned, but started — the annexation of Crimea the day before we reached the first agreement and while President Yanukovych was still in power.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Russian Federation has requested the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Maybe we could continue this discussion in an another place. The representative of Ukraine helped me work on that agreement. We believe it is important. However, President Yanukovych gave up too much as a result of that agreement, and it seems that its provisions were weak. That is true, because he was overthrown, but the signatories of that agreement should have insisted on respect for the agreement as signed.

Perhaps the representative of Ukraine has his own interpretation, but the problem is that, if that agreement had been respected, then in 2014 Ukraine would have had a new constitution and there would not have been a conflict. But it started shooting and started to use force, and now we have seen what has happened.

Throughout this crisis, we have been repeating one word: "dialogue, dialogue, dialogue". However, Ukraine carried out anti-terrorist operations, there were terrorists, et cetera, and that is what they got.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Russian Federation has circulated the draft of a press statement. Considering the situation in the Council, I propose that after the meeting we continue to discuss the text among relevant members. If I hear no objection, it is so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2016/355)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/401, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/355, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara.

The Council is ready to proceed to a vote on the draft resolutions before it. I shall first put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

Against:

Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Abstaining:

Angola, New Zealand and Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There were 10 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2285 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Ms. Power (United States of America): The United States supports the Security Council's adoption of the resolution 2285 (2016), which renews for another year the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). MINURSO plays an indispensable role in preserving and ensuring safety and security in Western Sahara and must continue to do so until a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara is achieved. We thank members of the Security Council and those in the Group of Friends of Western Sahara for their support in concluding the negotiations on the MINURSO mandate renewal and adopting the resolution today in advance of the mandate's expiration tomorrow.

As we all know, this year's mandate renewal was challenging and contentious. That is an understatement. It is taking place against a backdrop of significant uncertainty for the Mission, with the removal of civilian staff, including the Mission's political component, rendering MINURSO incapable of fully functioning and fulfilling its mandate. Civilian staff provide essential support of the Mission's operations. Under-Secretary-General Ladsous has made abundantly clear that the current conditions in which MINURSO is striving to do its job are unsustainable.

It is important that Morocco and the United Nations have a constructive relationship. In fact, it is absolutely necessary if the United Nations-led process, which we all support, is to bring about a peaceful, sustainable and mutually agreed solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. To that end, it is critically important that continued engagement between Morocco and the United Nations leads to resolving the challenges facing MINURSO and to restoring MINURSO to full functionality.

The policy of the United States regarding Western Sahara has not changed. We consider Morocco's autonomy plan serious, realistic and credible. It represents a potential approach that could satisfy the self-determination aspirations of the people of Western Sahara. At the same time, the United States believes that we — and by "we" I mean not only our Government but also the Security Council — have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the mandates that we authorize and to ensure the effectiveness and safety of peacekeeping personnel worldwide, including those serving in MINURSO.

The Security Council must respond swiftly and proactively in any situation in which a Government requires the staff from a United Nations peacekeeping mission immediately to depart. Our goal has been and remains securing a return to the full functionality of

the MINURSO mission as soon as possible so that it can fulfil the mandate given to it by the Council. We consider the civilian component, including the political reporting function, to be a crucial part of that mandate. Resolution 2285 (2016) provides an important signal from the Council and a realistic path to achieving that necessary return to full functionality.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): It was with great disappointment that New Zealand abstained today. This was the first time during our current term on the Security Council that we have not supported the adoption of a Council resolution.

It should not have been like this. It should have been possible to maintain the tradition of consensus on this important issue. We thank the United States for its determined efforts to that end. But consensus implies a meeting of minds and common commitment. Those elements have not been a feature of the preparation of this resolution. Rather, we have seen, again, the preparation of a text in a Group of Friends whose composition does not reflect the span of perspectives that exists on the Western Sahara, neither among the protagonists on this issue nor on the Council, and an unwillingness to accept modest amendments on a text that deals with an issue of importance to the whole Council, indeed to the whole United Nations membership.

In New Zealand's view, today's resolution falls short of what the Council should be doing to discharge properly its responsibilities on the Western Sahara. A resolution that truly reflected the gravity of the current crisis over the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the magnitude of the challenge inherent in the full discharge of the MINURSO mandate should have done the following things.

First, the resolution should have stated the reality that the expulsion of the civilian component had seriously compromised the Mission and its ability to discharge its mandate. These facts have been repeatedly stated by the Secretariat in its briefings to the Council over the past month.

Secondly, the resolution should have called for the immediate restoration of the full functionality of the Mission and provided for the Council's continued engagement to ensure that a return to full functionality is achieved in the near future.

Thirdly, on the core political direction of the mandate, the Council should have taken up the sensible and appropriate advice of the Secretary-General, reiterated in this week's consultations by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Christopher Ross, and Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous, that the time had come to engage in serious negotiations without preconditions and in good faith to reach a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. And that mutually acceptable solution should include the resolution of the dispute over the status of Western Sahara, including through agreement on the nature and form of the exercise of self-determination. As Mr. Ladsous told the Council quite categorically on Wednesday (see S/PV.7679), we can no longer procrastinate in addressing these deep underlying issues.

MINURSO fulfils an essential function, and its inability to fulfil its mandate risks fuelling further instability in an already troubled region. The Council must provide the full weight of its support to the Mission. Notwithstanding our abstention, New Zealand reiterates its full support for MINURSO, its mandate, the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and Special Representative.

Finally, in our view, every member of the Security Council must reflect on the broader implications of the current episode over MINURSO's deployment for the Council's stewardship of its peacekeeping operations globally.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela voted against the adoption of resolution 2285 (2016), on the renewal of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), for substantive reasons and of procedure, which have troubled us deeply. This entire process has been characterized by a terrible lack of transparency, which made it difficult for us to reach the shared goal of consensus. The results of the voting this morning constitute a clear message that a significant number of the members of the Security Council see that there is a clear fracture in the different positions held by Council members on how to resolve this issue.

First of all, I should like to point out that the discussion of this issue was preceded by a series of events that shaped the way this matter would be

dealt with in the Security Council. Let us recall that, on 18 November 2015, we asked for an "Any other business" discussion in the Security Council in the face of the serious difficulties that Ambassador Christopher Ross, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, had to confront in order to carry out his diplomatic work in the territory. At that time, Venezuela warned against that attempt on the part of one of the parties — the Moroccan side — to impede the work of the Special Envoy. But it was not possible to count on the backing of the Security Council in the light of our concern, which foresaw a conflicting situation with regard to the Council's mandate. Similarly, when the Secretary-General tried on various occasions to visit Western Sahara, he faced many obstacles by the Government of Morocco, which set preconditions and reservations. My country asked the Council for us to express our support for the Secretary-General in carrying out his duties. However, it was not possible to come up with any elements, not even for the press, on the Council's support for the Secretary-General. Finally, following the Secretary-General's visit to the Western Sahara territories, and given that the terrible, unprecedented number of impediments he encountered in carrying out his duties, Venezuela once again asked for a Security Council analysis of the situation and a statement from the Council, which were also not possible. In other words, the Council was not able to anticipate a situation such as the one produced later on by Morocco's expulsion of the civilian component of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

In that regard, the Security Council has been subject to a great deal of pressure on the part of some of its members, as well as an incredible amount of pressure by Morocco, so that we are not able to meet the responsibilities entrusted to us to prevent conflicts such as the latent one in the region of Western Sahara. Following the expulsion of the MINURSO civilian component, already a month ago, the Council was also incapable of expressing its position in rejection of this unprecedented situation precipitated by a country that ought to embrace, protect and facilitate the fulfilment of the mandate of a peacekeeping mission.

Previously, we also expressed our deep annoyance and disappointment that it was not possible, as is the practice in other cases, for the closed consultations on this issue to be preceded by a briefing to the Security Council, which would have made it possible to hear, here in Hall and before the entire international community, the views of the Head of MINURSO, Ms. Kim Bolduc, and of Special Envoy Christopher Ross, as well as those of former President Joaquim Chissano, Special Envoy of the African Union for Western Sahara. Let us recall that last year when we voted on and adopted the resolution on MINURSO (see S/PV.7435) we asked that former President Chissano, who is a hero of Africa and decolonization processes, could take the floor. That was not possible, however, because, once again, members of the Security Council blocked it.

All of this is to say that this process was preceded by a host of impediments, irregularities and situations that have served to create a state of absolute lack of transparency. Most serious of all, as we see it, is that with so many actions the effort has been to change de facto — as has happened on the ground — the mandate of MINURSO. Without its civilian component, MINURSO simply cannot take the necessary steps to carry out the referendum, which is in fact the mandate the Security Council established. We should remember that carrying out a referendum was what allowed for agreement between the parties and for the establishment of the ceasefire. The parties put their trust in the Security Council, and the ceasefire has been in place for 25 years to lead to a referendum. That solution seems increasingly far off, given the intention, in an arbitrary way and counter to the mandate of the Council, to forget about the referendum as the solution for the Sahraoui people.

Against that backdrop of clear contempt, last Wednesday at 3.30 p.m. we were presented with a draft resolution (see S/2016/401). Apparently, it had been discussed in the Group of Friends. However, the rest of the members did not have access to it. Thanks to the efforts made by the President of the Security Council, it was possible to extend its consideration for an additional day. Yesterday was held the first and only substantive meeting to discuss the matter, which did not in fact lead to achieving consensus.

Moreover, the text before us, which was adopted at resolution 2285 (2016), does not address the legitimate concerns and proposals of several of the countries with an interest in this important issue, including Venezuela. The resolution ignores the current situation on the ground, which has been the subject of various closed meetings of the Council and which has produced deep concern among Member States. It is not enough to bemoan the situation with MINURSO, as the resolution does; rather, it should have emphatically condemned

Morocco's unilateral expulsion of international staff and demanded their immediate return. A Security Council document that is not capable of stating clearly who expelled MINURSO's civilian contingent, or why, is a text that aims to intentionally ignore the reality in Western Sahara. We believe we have lost an outstanding opportunity for the Security Council to express, via this resolution, its absolute disagreement with the expulsion of MINURSO's civilian personnel, which constitutes not just a harsh blow for the political negotiating process but also a lamentable precedent for the international community.

In addition, our attention was starkly drawn to the fact that the resolution does include any measures to ensure the return of MINURSO's civilian staff to the area of operations. Regrettably, we must state that had this involved a weaker country without the right allies in the Council, the Security Council would not have hesitated to impose severe sanctions, as it often does with many brotherly African countries. We are sending a message to the international community that is possible to violate the decisions of the Security Council without consequence for Member States. It was not even possible to include a provision in the resolution aimed at setting a 30-day period for a periodic consideration of this issue by the Security Council. As provided by the resolution adopted, it will be 90 days before the Secretary-General, who by then will be about to be replaced, informs the Security Council as to what has happened with MINURO's civilian staff. And it should be noted that will be only to "inform", and no concrete actions are foreseen. This seems paradoxical: MINURSO's entire essential component having been expelled, in just 72 hours, the Council does not have the will to meet once per month to look into developments in the situation on the ground. What is more, the text of the resolution does not even take up the just aspirations of the Sahraoui population, which for more than 40 years have lived in a territory under a pending decolonization process, or the existing concerns with regard to protecting the human rights in Western Sahara while taking into account the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2016/355).

We believe that the status quo with regard to Western Sahara is already unsustainable. It is for that reason that the ambiguous language of the resolution sends a negative signal and reflects a disheartening message. We should not forget that MINURSO's mandate was first set out in resolution 690 (1991), which urged the Mission to make every effort to pursue a just and lasting solution by undertaking a referendum on the self-determination of the Sahraoui people. It is that people who should choose between autonomy and independence.

It is essential that, in dealing with the issue of Western Sahara, the Council should act with authority, determination and transparency, and in accordance with international law. We are facing a situation in which the Security Council is at risk of failing to fulfil its mandate, and it will now be very difficult to comply with Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations, which confers the primary responsibility on the Council for the maintenance of international peace and security on behalf of Member States. In the past, there have been serious deficiencies in that regard, including cases where the permanent members of the Council have violated the Charter. Such violations of the international rule of law must end and the Council must live up to its responsibilities.

If the people of Western Sahara are not guaranteed the right to determine their own future and the Kingdom of Morocco is allowed to continue to occupy the territory, it will be the first time since the founding of the United Nations that the international community accepts de facto that a non-self-governing territory, recognized as being in the decolonization process, would be forcibly annexed without the people's consent.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes and supports MINURSO's important role in overseeing the ceasefire, reducing the threat of mines and unexploded ordnance and promoting confidence-building measures between the parties with the aim of holding the referendum, which represents its principal mandate. Our vote against today's resolution in no way means that we deny the significant efforts being made by the civilian and other personnel of MINURSO, who even in extremely difficult conditions are trying to do their jobs on the ground. Nor are we ignoring the Secretary-General's efforts to mediate and facilitate, and he has our full support in that regard, as does his Personal Envoy Christopher Ross and Ms. Bolduc, in holding direct talks in good faith between the parties to the conflict. MINURSO should continue to cooperate and to immediately re-establish its operational and political capacities in order to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate, so as to deal with the difficult situation facing displaced and separated Sahrawi families and

enable them to live in dignity on the land that belongs to them, in their own country.

The Security Council's lack of action on such an urgent and serious issue is unacceptable. We have said that to other Council members in our closed meetings, and we continue to condemn it and to refuse to validate it. The situation regarding Morocco's treatment of MINURSO and its mandate is completely irregular and has been validated in a weak Security Council resolution, which we reject. With it, we have lost an opportunity to send a strong message to the parties demanding the restoration of MINURSO's civilian personnel, whose work we support and appreciate as the only means ensuring the maintenance of the ceasefire over the past 25 years and more. We also demand that negotiations be resumed with a view to holding a referendum on self-determination.

Lastly, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regrets the fact that we have lost an opportunity to reassert the Security Council's responsibility to work for a just solution when the people of Western Sahara have been waiting for more than 40 years to be able to overcome their situation, that of the last remaining colony on our brotherly continent of Africa.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to applaud the persistent efforts of the United States, which worked tirelessly to ensure that resolution 2285 (2016), which we just adopted, represented a response adequate to the difficulties we have witnessed in the past few weeks in relations between Morocco and the Secretary-General regarding the issue of Western Sahara and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The goal, after all, is to create the conditions conducive to restoring an atmosphere conducive to calm and to the proper functioning of MINURSO, to which we are all very committed.

Thanks to the decision we have just taken, MINURSO's mandate has been renewed for a year and for the entire Mission. That could be crucial, since the Mission does essential work on the ground, and I would like to commend the work of the Ms. Kim Bolduc, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Mr. Christopher Ross, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General himself. They have all contributed within their areas of responsibility to ensuring that the ceasefire is maintained and to advancing the situation towards a settlement of the dispute, which is so necessary to the people of Western Sahara and to the stability, security and prosperity of the region, which is in any case facing major security challenges. As a result, France will continue to support the political process, led by the United Nations and aimed at making progress towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On the substance of the issues, France believes that the plan for autonomy presented by Morocco in 2007 represents a serious and credible basis for a negotiated solution. Now that the mandate has been renewed, steps must be taken as quickly as possible to enable MINURSO's mandate to be fully implemented, and specifically resolving the issue of its personnel, particularly the civilian component, which in the past few weeks has been the subject of discussion between Morocco and the Secretary-General. For its part, the Council should continue to follow the issue actively and to work to establish a climate of trust and positive momentum conducive to political negotiations, the responsibility for which lies in the United Nations with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy. France will continue to support every effort in that regard.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain voted in favour of today's resolution 2285 (2016). We heartily commend the efforts of the United States as facilitator and other members of the Security Council for their work. We are well aware of the difficulties those negotiations presented. Spain would have preferred that this year we could have once again adopted the resolution unanimously in a demonstration of the Council's unity. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

Among other things, the role of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) is crucial to maintaining peace and security in a strategic region. We believe that the text of the resolution succeeded in achieving a balance between the annual renewal, which in our view provides necessary institutional stability, and appropriate follow-up on the part of the Security Council to ensure that MINURSO is restored to full functionality and is in a condition to comply fully with its mandate, as called for in the resolution we have just adopted. It is time to overcome this crisis. We encourage Morocco and the Secretariat to intensify their contact and efforts.

Beyond today's mandate renewal, Spain believes that the international community must focus its efforts on helping the parties to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that calls for the free self-determination of the people of Western Sahara within a framework of provisions in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2285 (2016). Although the past few weeks have been regrettable, today's resolution must mark a turning point in the urgent efforts to bring the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) back to full functionality. MINURSO's work, including its vital civilian component and political reporting function, is critical to the stability of Western Sahara. Recent events have rendered it unable to deliver on its mandate over the past six weeks.

Let me be clear. The Council has the responsibility to protect the integrity of its peacekeeping missions and to preserve their ability to implement their mandate. MINURSO is no exception. In that regard, resolution 2285 (2016), adopted today, contains two important elements. First, it emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to be returned to full functionality. Secondly, it contains a review mechanism in the form of a briefing by the Secretary-General within the next 90 days to ensure that that reinforcement happens and an undertaking for the Council to consider how best to achieve that outcome, if it is not fully functional. In the meantime, we urge the resumption of productive talks between Morocco and the United Nations, so that the Council can be satisfied that MINURSO is again fully functional.

Our collective focus must also return to the United Nations process and to finding a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution for Western Sahara, one that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The United Kingdom position on that issue remains the same. The United Nations process will continue to have our full support.

As Western Sahara illustrates, there are too many intractable long-running disputes on the agenda of the Council, so today we urge the parties to engage constructively with each other and with the United Nations process, so that together we can find a solution and settle the question of Western Sahara once and for all. Doing so is not only of the utmost importance to the Western Saharan refugees, who continue to suffer from the protracted dispute, but also for the security and economic prosperity of all countries and all peoples in the Maghreb region.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine voted today in favour of resolution 2285 (2016), given its conviction that the Council has to ensure that the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) continues to conduct its operations, which are vital for peace, stability and security in Western Sahara. The resolution adopted is important, not just for the sake of the continued work of the Mission but for creating the proper environment and providing the necessary impetus for a relaunch of the political process so as to achieve a lasting and mutually acceptable solution.

At the same time, we fully share the concerns, and even the frustrations, of some Council members about the current circumstances in which the Mission has to operate. We therefore emphasize the urgent need to restore the Mission's full capabilities, including political functions, as soon as possible.

We commend the Group of Friends of Western Sahara for their efforts aimed at resolving the current situation. Ukraine calls upon all parties to cooperate in good faith with the operations of MINURSO and to take the necessary steps to ensure the security, unhindered movement and full freedom of access of the United Nations and associated personnel in carrying out their mandate in conformity with existing agreements.

In conclusion, I would like to express Ukraine's support for the United Nations efforts to find a solution to the issue of Western Sahara.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank the Permanent Mission of the United States for preparing the text of resolution 2285 (2016), given the delicate circumstances involved. Malaysia voted in favour of the resolution, which renews the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year and emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality, as we are mindful of the importance of preserving the integrity and ability of MINURSO to fulfil its mandate as stipulated in the Council's resolutions.

The ongoing operation of MINURSO is indispensable to stability and security in Western Sahara. We reiterate Malaysia's principal positions on

the need to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, as well as our firm commitment and support for United Nations peacekeeping operations as a tool for the maintenance of international peace and security. We would like to underscore Malaysia's continued support for the efforts of MINURSO, as well as that of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, Ambassador Christopher Ross, to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as on respect for the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. In that regard, we would like to emphasize the importance of full cooperation by all parties with the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and with MINURSO in order to enable them to perform the tasks mandated by the Council.

Lastly, we would have hoped for a broad, inclusive and transparent consultation process on draft resolutions that would take into consideration the legitimate concerns and views of all Council members. Sufficient time for consultations would enable us to seek clarity on the issues at hand, consider sensible options and determine the guiding principles for consensus-building measures.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): Let me begin by emphasizing the critical role that the United Nations plays under the leadership of the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and the Head of the Mission in maintaining peace and security, as well as in promoting mutual trust and achieving a political solution in Western Sahara.

On the ground, the personnel of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) carry out important tasks mandated by the Council. MINURSO has managed to continue its operations with a limited capacity after the departure of 73 of its personnel on 20 March. That continuity has been possible solely owing to the dedicated efforts of the remaining personnel of MINURSO, whom I wish to commend.

On 24 March, members of the Security Council expressed serious concerns about the developments related to Western Sahara and therefore stressed the importance of addressing the situation, so that MINURSO might resume its full capacity to carry out its mandate. Peacekeeping operations and other missions are deployed by the Council to carry out critical tasks around the world to maintain international peace and security. Given that the mandate of MINURSO was due to expire on 30 April, many Member States, including Japan, made strenuous efforts to address the situation. It was a matter of priority for the Council to extend the mandate of the Mission by tomorrow. At the same time, it was also necessary to ensure that MINURSO returns to full functionality as a matter of urgency.

Japan voted in favour of resolution 2285 (2016) because it provides the answer to those priorities. I would also like to express our appreciation to the penholder, the United States, for its efforts in preparing the draft resolution. A return to full functionality should, in our view, include on-site political reporting capabilities, so that MINURSO will be able to fully carry out its mandate contained in the relevant Council resolution, including the one we have just adopted.

In the resolution, the Council requests to be briefed within 90 days, but that does not mean that we should wait 90 days to take action. Rather, in the light of the urgency, efforts should be made to recover full functionality in an expeditious manner. It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that its resolutions, including this one, are fully implemented. We look to the Kingdom of Morocco, an important member of the international community, to continue its utmost efforts to improve the situation in cooperation with the United Nations. Japan stands ready to assist such efforts in any way it can.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the need for lasting adherence to the ceasefire and the importance of the continuation of negotiations towards a long overdue political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt voted in favour of resolution 2285 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for a full year, convinced as we are of the importance of the role played by United Nations peacekeeping forces in maintaining international peace and security, and our role as a troop-contributor.

The region is facing several challenges that threaten its people and threaten the existence of the States in the region. Those are circumstances that should not be further aggravated. In that context, since last March, Egypt has called for a calm and balanced approach.

That is the only way that the Council will be able to deal with this matter. That position was reflected during the negotiations on resolution 2285 (2016), adopted today. The contents of the resolution are drafted well and in a very careful and precise manner in order to convey the situation in Western Sahara, and with a view to settling the crisis there in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions.

After having adopted this very important resolution, which draws on lessons from past experience, and after having prevented what could have become a large-scale crisis, we must examine in a thorough and in-depth manner the events that were set in motion on 7 March, in addition to the events that followed and their causes. We must learn lessons from the past in order to maintain international peace and security. Furthermore, the main lesson of the events of the past two months is the danger of an explosion of conflicts that have been left unresolved. We must reiterate the importance of reaching, within the framework of Security Council resolutions, a political settlement agreed to by all with regard to Western Sahara.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): The Security Council has just adopted resolution 2285 (2016) to renew the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Angola abstained in the voting for a number of reasons that we would like to outline, the first of which was a desire to reaffirm the expression of our political will and hope that it is never too late to correct mistakes. Angola, as a member of the African Union, is ready and remains fully engaged with regard to the search for a just solution for the people of Western Sahara. We regret that every proposed amendment to the draft, which were presented by a number of Member States, including Angola, met outright rejection. Indeed, there was no meaningful negotiation on this text. We made constructive proposals that, in our view, addressed the legitimate concerns of the international community but were not given due consideration.

Although we welcome the request for briefings by the Secretary-General at least twice a year, we deem it imperative to shorten the reporting period. The Security Council needs to be informed and constantly updated on developments on the ground. We believe that the current yearly report does not fit such a need, although the period has been reduced. The situation is too volatile, and the Council needs to remain seized. It must never miss the opportunity to act, as it did recently when unfortunate decisions that changed the operation of the Mission were made. The decisions made last month by one of the parties to the controversy have entailed serious consequences for the Mission's ability to fulfil its mandate. The decision on staffing has created a dangerous precedent for peacekeeping missions around the world, and for the very reputation of the Security Council, which is responsible for their deployment and management. The resolution adopted fails to address the situation with the seriousness and engagement that it deserves. One of our colleagues this morning referred to it as "significantly uncertain".

We would like to underscore that the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, dated 19 April, states that

> "[w]ithout a suitable and fully staffed international civilian component, the Mission cannot fulfil a core component of its functions" [and that] "the expulsion of most of the MINURSO international civilian component ... can be expected to be exploited by ... radical elements" (*S/2016/355, para. 93*).

And the Council is quite aware of the fact that, unfortunately, those radical elements are very much present in the region. The resolution should have requested the immediate return of MINURSO to full functionality without preconditions. That is one of the main reasons why we abstained in the voting earlier.

We believe that the Security Council should assume its responsibilities and address the failing parties by imposing appropriate measures as it has done in similar cases before. Angola cannot support the adoption of what we consider to be a biased resolution that validates double standards. The resolution should also have reaffirmed the mandate of MINURSO, including its political mandate, which is to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We believe that MINURSO should also be given a human rights mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the territory, which is of great concern to members of the Council.

In conclusion, Angola reaffirms its commitment to continuing its constructive engagement in order to support MINURSO's activities, with its full capacity, as mandated by the Security Council and in accordance

with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which was set up by the Security Council and includes Russian military observers, has played an extremely important stabilizing role. Its work has been effective and has allowed for the establishment of an environment that is conducive to advancement towards a political settlement of this long-standing issue, based on Security Council resolutions.

The relevant Security Council resolutions clearly set out that the form of the settlement must be acceptable to the parties, Morocco and the Polisario Front, and must provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara within the context of the procedures and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Monitoring the ceasefire is one of the key roles of the Mission; however, the political component is also of considerable importance. Since no one has changed the final goal, which was established through international decisions, the parties must realize that, without United Nations assistance, the difficult path towards a mutually acceptable settlement is unthinkable.

The situation concerning the Mission is, however, a cause for deep concern. We know that specific steps are being taken in order to diffuse the tension, but they have not yielded the hoped-for result. The actions that have been taken with regard to United Nations personnel may negatively impact the situation in the region, and what is very important for international peace and security, namely, United Nations peacekeeping efforts, has been made more difficult to implement. The confrontational approach must be replaced by a responsible one based on unconditional respect for Security Council decisions. The work of the Mission must be fully re-established. We need to bring all staff back to their responsibilities as soon as possible, so that they can fulfil unhindered the functions that have been assigned to them.

In our view, the text of resolution 2285 (2016), which extends the mandate of the Mission for the next 12 months suffers from substantive shortcomings. We were therefore unable to vote in favour of the resolution. The ninth preambular paragraph mentions serious and credible efforts to move the process forward towards a solution. Everyone who is aware of the current situation will say that that text has been outpaced by events and sends the wrong political message.

However, we would particularly stress the fact that we appreciate our good and historically friendly relationships with countries in the region, including, of course, Morocco, which are based on their multidimensional plans for development and respect and concern for each other's interests. Concerning the artificially exacerbated situation with regard to MINURSO, we should not forget the key task, which is to get a dialogue going between the parties, and that is of fundamental importance to efforts to support security and stability in that part of the world. In that regard, a positive role could be played by the African Union.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): With Senegal's vote in favour, the Security Council has just adopted resolution 2285 (2016), renewing for a period of 12 months the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, which was to expire tomorrow on 30 April. It is assuredly a balanced resolution, for which the delegation of Senegal would like to commend the leadership demonstrated by the United States of America in conducting the consultations. It is the result of the constructive spirit with which the members of the Council participated in the process, allowing for the achievement of a text this morning that entertains hope with regard to the political process, the only way to resolve the issue.

Bearing in mind the important role played by the United Nations in that process, as well as the equally constructive stance taken by Morocco, I would like pay tribute to them and encourage all efforts being made to enhance cooperation between the Secretariat and the Kingdom of Morocco. The dialogue was never broken between the parties, thanks, in particular, to the discrete diplomacy that has been deployed, as well as the bilateral contacts. The delegation of Senegal therefore takes this opportunity to highlight that the self-governance that Morocco has been proposing since 2007 appears to be positive, serious and realistic. It can encourage the pursuit of a climate of cooperation between the parties for a just, long-lasting and mutually acceptable solution in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Because this is one of the few occasions on which the subject of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been addressed in

an open meeting of the Security Council, Uruguay, as a non-permanent member elected by the General Assembly to the Security Council and a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, feelsduty-bound to relay to the other Member States much of what has been already expressed and presented in the various consultations of the Security Council and on which resolution 2285 (2016) is based.

Let us be very clear. Uruguay is in favour of maintaining the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, on the condition that it is able to fulfil each and every one of the components of the mandate set out by the Security Council. Uruguay has a long history of participating in peacekeeping operations under United Nations auspices. Currently, we have 1,500 troops deployed, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. Troop-contributing countries come to an agreement with the United Nations on a set of documents that serve as mutual guarantees with regard to the mandates of missions, standards and discipline, which are applicable at all times. Those documents are commonly known by their English names: status-of-forces agreement, status-of-mission agreement and rules of engagement, and so on.

The mandates provided by the Security Council and the entire set of documents that I have mentioned constitute the contract that binds troop-contributing countries with the United Nations. Furthermore, they are the guarantees that protect the personnel whom a country voluntarily contributes to a peacekeeping operation. Accordingly, it is obvious that that set of commitments can be modified only by whomever has the international legitimacy to do so. In this case, that is the Security Council.

The Security Council today adopted resolution 2285 (2016) on the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. The text was presented to the members of the Security Council in an initial version on Wednesday afternoon — Ambassador Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño of Venezuela pointed out that it was at 3.30 p.m. — and the draft of the resolution that we adopted today was presented at 6.45 p.m. yesterday. The resolution was drafted in consultations with a very small and self-convened group called the Group of Friends on Western Sahara. Although we feel that we are friends of the Western Sahara, apparently we are not qualified to be members of that select group.

Owing to the content and structure of the resolution, the text is almost identical to the resolutions adopted by the Council in previous years. In other words, it is business as usual. My delegation believes, however, that we are very far from business as usual, because on 16 March, the Permanent Mission of Morocco conveyed to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General a list of 84 members of the international civilian component of the MINURSO and the African Union who had to leave Morocco within three days' time. It was a document — an objective fact — and we have all read it. That sovereign yet unilateral decision taken by Morocco immediately altered and radically changed the conditions of the operationality of the Mission provided for by the Security Council, which today barely manages to maintain its self-sufficiency — far from complying with the mandate with which it was entrusted.

We all know that the sovereign decisions adopted by Morocco indicate that their authorities felt deeply offended by the statements made by the Secretary-General during his visit to the region in early March. For my delegation, the question of offenses must be resolved directly between the person who was offended and the offender. Each party will decide on the actions that they wish to take with regard to one another, but between themselves, without affecting a third party.

My delegation deems that the sovereign measures adopted by Morocco have no connection to the person whom that country considers to be the offender — the Secretary-General — but are rather aimed at the entire Organization that he represents. The expulsion of the international civilian component of MINURSO from Western Sahara has nothing to do with any offence that the Secretary-General could have committed. It has everything to do with the mandate that the Security Council established in a timely manner and with the functionality of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

That is why we were very surprised, in reading the text of the resolution, not to find a single reference to the fact that a decision has disrupted the operation of an important peacekeeping mission. I should like to read out the twenty-third preambular paragraph of resolution 2285 (2016), which consists of the following curious statement:

> "Regretting that MINURSO's ability to fully carry out its mandate has been affected as the

majority of its civilian component, including political personnel, cannot perform their duties within MINURSO's area of operations."

The Security Council does not explain in any way how the inability of the Mission to carry out its tasks might have arisen. We have no indication as to whether a lack of means or equipment or some impediment on the part of the personnel are responsible, or if a serious misfortune — a dengue or chikungunya virus infection — arose to prevent that from happening.

Following the text, we see that in operative paragraph 1, despite the fact that the Council admits that MINURSO is prevented from carrying out its tasks, it has decided to extend it until 30 April 2017. Paragraph 2 emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality. In regard to a Mission that cannot comply with its tasks for unknown reasons and whose mandate has been extended, the Council points to the urgent need for it to return to full functionality. Frankly, we have no idea what the phrase "full functionality" means. It is clear that it is a comparative term and that "full" will depend on the parametre that it is measured against. For example, if tomorrow we compare the functionality of MINURSO to how MINURSO is functioning today, clearly MINURSO will have reached full functionality. Perhaps the provision was intended to imply that "full functionality" was the state of operation enjoyed by the Mission on 15 March, before the adoption of the sovereign measure taken by Morocco, but for one reason or another that is not specified in that sentence.

Finally, I would like to refer paragraph 3, which

> "Requests the Secretary-General to brief the Council within 90 days on whether MINURSO has returned to full functionality and expresses its intention, if MINURSO has not achieved full functionality, to consider how best to facilitate the achievement of this goal".

I would like to point out several issues in that regard.

First, the Council provides no guideline on what to do or how to ensure that MINURSO recovers full functionality, nor does it point who is responsible for leading the process of the return to a normal situation. I admit there is some logic to the Security Council's inability to explain why functionality was lost or what it means by "return to full functionality", and that it is therefore unable to define how and who has to do it.

Secondly, the timeline for a return to full functionality — three months — is too long. We all remember Murphy's Law. Murphy has a special chapter on "committology" that is guided by the principle that every committee tends to use to the maximum the period entrusted to it to carry out its task. Murphy was an optimist. In that regard, there is also a certain logic to this three-month period. The Council does not know why, how or who has to carry out this task, so it is best to provide for as long a deadline as possible.

Thirdly, it is not very common, but the Council itself is expressing serious doubts as to whether the Mission can return to full functionality within three months. If that were not the case, the Council would not need to reaffirm its intention to consider how best to facilitate achievement of that goal.

With respect to the phrase "expresses its intention", allow me to make a frank comment. We are all familiar with the variety of tones used in diplomacy to refer to the degrees of commitment that we are willing to make. We have all on different occasions used different expressions — I will say them in English since that is the language in which we usually draft — such as "shall", "will", "would", "should", "may", "might", "ought to" and so on, to express our intentions. The phrase that represents one of the most tenuous types of commitment on the spectrum is the term "best endeavours". Thus, if it is decided after three months that we have not returned to full functionality, the most that the Council is committed to is "to consider how best to facilitate achievement of this goal". I have to ask — would any of us sign a contract to sell our house to a buyer who expresses the intention of paying us but does not even set a price?

After so much discussion, it would have been far simpler to include a provision stipulating something along the line of "urges the Government of Morocco to facilitate forthwith the full recomposition of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara", such that it could fully carry out the mandate established by the Security Council. As some of my colleagues have already pointed out, we were unable to rupture the iron-clad content of the text that is presented here.

I reiterate that Uruguay is in favour of maintaining a United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara which that is able to comply with every element of its mandate, as defined by the Security

Council. Our delegation believes that resolution 2285 (2016) does not endow the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara with the tools or guarantees necessary to comply with its mandate. That is why my Government felt obligated to vote against the resolution.

In conclusion, Uruguay endorses and supports the actions of the entire Secretariat, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Western Sahara, and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. We unreservedly support the work undertaken by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Moreover, as a troop-contributing country in many missions, we pay tribute to all MINURSO personnel, who face ongoing and ever-greater difficulties.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

The Council just adopted resolution 2285 (2016), on extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), in which it decides to do so for one year and emphasizes the urgent need for the Mission to return to full functionality expeditiously. It also reflects the will and resolve of the Security Council to push for a political solution to the question of Western Sahara and maintain MINURSO's mandate.

China supports the extension of MINURSO to allow it to resume its full capacity to implement the Council's resolution at the earliest. It is our hope that the Mission will continue to play an important role in the implementation of the Council's resolutions and in stabilizing the situation in Western Sahara.

China has maintained a consistent position on the question of Western Sahara. We will continue to uphold a fair and objective position on the matter and support the United Nations in its efforts to push for a political solution to the question. We encourage both parties, based on the relevant Council resolutions, to seek a fair, long-lasting solution which is acceptable to both sides through negotiations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of April, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of China to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staff and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us.

It has been a busy month and one in which we have reached consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone and without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all of the relevant conference service officers. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the Egyptian delegation good luck in the month of May.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): As this is the first formal meeting of the Council for the month of May, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Liu Jieyi, Permanent Representative of China, for his service as President of the Council for the month of April. I am sure that I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Liu and his delegation for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Health care in armed conflict

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Micronesia, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/380, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxemborg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Micronesia, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, .

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2286 (2016).

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and I give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin by welcoming the presence of Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The ICRC and MSF are our good partners, playing unique and vital roles in conflict and disaster areas. Through their leaders here today, I want to thank and commend all of their personnel for

their professionalism and dedication in serving people in danger and distress across the world.

Last week, MSF's head of mission in Aleppo underscored the urgency and importance of efforts such as resolution 2286 (2016), which has been adopted today. "No corner is being spared", he said. And he added: "Aleppo is already a shell of what it once was; this most recent assault appears determined to eliminate even that". He was reacting to an air strike, by all accounts by the Government of Syria, that destroyed a hospital, killing at least 20 people, including three children and the area's one and only pediatrician, Dr. Mohammed Wassim Maas.

Yet this appalling act was only the latest wartime assault on health care in Syria. Since the beginning of the conflict, Physicians for Human Rights has documented more than 360 attacks on some 250 medical facilities. More than 730 medical personnel have been killed. Today, almost half of all medical facilities in Syria are closed or only partially functioning. Millions of Syrians lack life-saving health care.

A similarly pattern of systematic destruction of health facilities is evident in Yemen. More than 600 medical facilities have closed because of damage sustained in the conflict and shortages of supplies and medical workers. Last year, the United Nations verified 59 attacks against 34 hospitals. In January this year, coalition air strikes hit the Shiara hospital, which serves around 120,000 people in Sa'dah governorate. Following the attack, pregnant women were reportedly forced to give birth in caves rather than risk travelling to the hospital. And last October in Kunduz, Afghanistan, a bombing by United States military destroyed another MSF hospital and killed dozens as patients were burned alive in their beds. These patterns are repeated in other conflicts, including in Iraq and South Sudan, where violence against health care is multiplying the difficulties of already fragile health systems.

Such attacks must end. When so-called surgical strikes end up hitting surgical wards, something is deeply wrong. Explanations ring hollow to parents burying their children and communities pushed closer to collapse. All too often, there is no respect for the sick and no sanctity for those who provide care. All too often, attacks on health facilities and medical workers are not just isolated or incidental battlefield fallout, but rather the intended objective of the combatants. This is shameful and inexcusable. In Syria, Government forces systematically remove medical supplies from humanitarian convoys. In Syria and elsewhere, Governments impose cumbersome procedures that restrict access to health care. This is strangulation by red tape. It is violence by bureaucratic means rather than force of arms, but it is just as devastating.

Let us be clear. Intentional and direct attacks on hospitals are war crimes. Denying people access to essential health care is a serious violation of international humanitarian law. All State and non-State parties to conflict are bound by a strict obligation to respect and protect medical personnel, facilities and vehicles, as well as the wounded and sick. Parties to conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief, including medical missions. These obligations are at the very heart of international humanitarian law. The Council and all Member States must do more than condemn such attacks. They must use every ounce of influence to press parties to respect their obligations. They must press for perpetrators to be held fully accountable.

The resolution that the Council has just adopted demonstrates the Council's determination to strengthen the protection of health care in armed conflict. For the sake of humanity, I urge all Member States, parties to conflict and other relevant actors to heed the Council's demands, facilitate humanitarian access, develop domestic legal frameworks that protect health facilities and medical workers, train armed forces so that they understand their obligations, and prosecute those responsible for such attacks and other violations.

The growing insecurity of medical services is part of a broader trend of blatant disregard for international law in armed conflict. Across the world, parties to conflict are disregarding the most basic rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Every day, civilians are deliberately or indiscriminately killed or injured. Densely populated towns and cities are pummelled by air strikes and heavy shelling. Millions of people have fled their homes into perilous and uncertain futures. Impunity compounds the crime.

Last October, President Peter Maurer of the International Committee of the Red Cross and I issued a joint statement calling on States to take urgent action to uphold international law and address human suffering. I repeat that call in the Chamber today. Even wars have rules; it is time to uphold and enforce them. No Government should stand by and watch the erosion

of safeguards for the protection of civilians in conflict. The international community must never become numb to flagrant abuses.

Affirming our common humanity will be a key theme at the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May, and it serves to highlight the importance and timeliness of that first-of-its-kind event. I encourage Member States to seize the opportunity of the Summit to take concrete action to uphold the norms that safeguard humankind. Our world confronts disasters of staggering size and complexity. One hundred and twenty-five million people need humanitarian assistance, and at least 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes or countries. The World Humanitarian Summit is the moment to come together to renew our commitment to preventing and ending crisis and to show that we are steadfast in reducing suffering and vulnerability. We need the full engagement and commitment of all partners, Governments and non-governmental organizations. We can strengthen humanitarian response and fulfil that duty to the world's most vulnerable only by working together. The success of the Summit is in your hands.

Finally, I appeal to Member States to work with greater intensity to find political solutions to end bloodshed and suffering. As the skies over Aleppo and other parts of Syria continue to be filled with barrel bombs and artillery fire, we must all work relentlessly to rescue the cessation of hostilities. That is crucial for saving lives and for the credibility of the political process and, indeed, once again, that of the Council.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Maurer.

Mr. Maurer: A couple of months ago, I stood in front of a four-story building — it was really more the shell of a building, completely bombed out, burned out and ripped apart, with steel cables sticking out from the load-bearing walls and rubble all around. The only indication that it had once been a hospital was a surgical lamp, miraculously still attached to the ceiling of the second floor. I was in Syria, but I could just as well have been in Afghanistan, South Sudan, Yemen or any other place.

It is a painful paradox that in times of greatest need the availability of health care is at its lowest. In war people are injured, malnourished and sick. Yet the greater the need for medical treatment, the more difficult it is to obtain such treatment, because the few places and persons that can help come under attack.

I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to brief the Council on such an important issue. I also thank the Secretary-General for his kind words at the beginning of this meeting, as well as for our good partnership and friendship throughout the year as we confront challenges such as the one we are discussing today.

The ICRC has found that 2,400 attacks against patients and health personnel, facilities and transports occurred in 11 conflict-affected countries over the course of three years. That is more than two attacks per day, every day, for three years. And we looked at only 11 countries in our study. Last year, the World Health Organization announced that 60 per cent of health-care facilities in Syria had been damaged or destroyed, while 25,000 people were being wounded every month. Stephen O'Brien, Emergency Relief Coordinator, has stated that, after a year of fighting in Yemen, one quarter of the country's health services have been destroyed or shut down. In 2015, the ICRC registered a 50 per cent increase in Afghanistan in the number of incidents against health staff and facilities, as compared with the previous year. That means one incident every three days, without considering how many incidents go unreported.

Not always, but far too often, such incidents, attacks and destruction constitute outright violations of international humanitarian law. It is no coincidence that the very first Geneva Convention, in 1864, pertained to the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick — to be precise, the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field. As wars and armed conflicts have evolved from taking place in open battlefields to urban areas, and from the use of pistols to mass shelling and bombardment by air forces, the wounded and the sick are no longer just those in uniform. The wounded and the sick now include Ramish, who was 9 years old when he stepped on a mine in Afghanistan. They include Mathilde, who was raped by fighters while she was harvesting her fields with her husband in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They include the wife of Khaled in Syria, whom I met and who died during childbirth because there was no midwife or doctor to atttend to her. And they include all the nameless patients in the hospital I mentioned at the beginning of my briefing.

Those are just a few examples of the human beings, and their stories, that the staff and volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are confronted with in the field, every day, around the world. They show the impact of war on people but, more important, they show that medical treatment and health care at large are crucial in time of war. International humanitarian law therefore specifically protects medical personnel, facilities and transports precisely because they are indispensable in time of war. Not doing so risks multiplying the impact on health systems, which in turn risk unravelling, with an impact far beyond the region concerned and imposing a burden on future generations.

Attacking a hospital, threatening a doctor, coercing a nurse to give preferential treatment to armed fighters, hijacking ambulances, using patients as human shields — such acts are not collateral damage, they are not sad realities that we have to get used to. They are abominations to fight and trends to roll back.

The direct effects on health-care facilities, personnel and transports are grave, yet the indirect effects go even deeper. When a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Yemen's Sa'ada province was destroyed in October 2015, it meant that 200,000 people instantly lost access to vital medical care. Five years into the war in Syria, the entire city of Rastan has one dentist left, for 120,000 people. Today the reality in too many war-torn countries is that if you do not die from shelling or fighting, you die because there is no dialysis equipment, no diabetes medicine, no antibiotics and no heart disease treatment. Death rates by communicable and non-communicable diseases often surpass death rates by weapons. That, for us as humanitarians, is an indicator that we are not confronted with mere temporary disruptions but with system disintegration. It is not just a hospital or a doctor affected; entire health systems unravel under the attacks on health facilities and personnel. The medical sector, alongside water, power and education infrastructure, is often the first in line to collapse under the cumulative impact of warfare, particularly in urban areas, when heavy explosive weapons are used. Where a lot of people live closely together and depend on infrastructure and public services that are all intertwined, the effects of attacks and destruction are greatest.

The ICRC, in a recent study, has summarized its experience with the successive disintegration of urban services for people in today's conflicts. What we see from the study is that humanitarian assistance is always insufficient to cope with the progressive dismantling of social services over time. What is needed is a fundamental change of behaviour in warfare. The humanitarian consequences of the cumulative impact that results when essential infrastructure like hospitals is annihilated must be taken into account when balancing military necessity against the protection of civilians, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

It is not true that the guiding principles of the conduct of hostilities in warfare are wrong or outdated. Rather, they need to be interpreted differently in today's environment. Much more weight has to be given to the impact on civilians and their protection in order to counter the decade-long trend in which civilians have borne the brunt of armed conflict or even become the very objective of attacks. Beyond the immediate, when attacks and the destruction of health infrastructure occur, efforts to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and fight against diseases, such as polio, are wiped out in a matter of seconds. Rebuilding what has been destroyed will take years, if not decades. International humanitarian law and humanitarian action play a critical role as guarantors for development progress during violence and conflicts. If they are violated, that function unravels, and health-care services are particularly vulnerable and exposed.

I want to commend the Council for adopting resolution 2286 (2016) today. I know from my own experiences at the Organization that every comma actually has carefully been considered and negotiated, and the result is strong. In clear language, the Council has underlined the importance of international humanitarian law and called on States and all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations and develop effective measures to protect people's lives by preventing and addressing violence against medical personnel, facilities, transport and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties. The resolution marks a momentous step in the international community's effort to draw attention to a problem that we otherwise risk getting used to through the sheer frequency of its occurrence. We have not yet been desensitized by such attacks because we are still outraged after every one. But after outrage must come action, not complacency. Therefore, while the resolution is an important step, it must mark not the end of a political process but the beginning of a practical effort. I ask the Council to build on the momentum of

the resolution. States and non-State armed groups must respect their obligations under international law.

Everyone on the Council knows that the ICRC as an inherently pragmatic institution. We recognize the dilemmas that exist in times of war, and we recognize the difficult balance between, once again, military necessity and humanitarian imperative, between principles and pragmatism, between short- and long-term concerns, and between our role as advocates for victims and as interlocutors of parties to conflicts to mitigate the effects of warfare on civilians and civilian infrastructure. We are committed to principled pragmatism. Norms and accountability for such norms are an important side of the medal. Condemnations are first and foremost political, not humanitarian acts. As humanitarians, we engage to change behaviours and prevent violations of international humanitarian law, thereby protecting people.

As members of the Council know, we engage with everyone who can make a difference, and the first in line are medical practitioners themselves. Therefore, together with the World Medical Association, the International Committee of Military Medicine, the International Council of Nurses, the International Pharmaceutical Federation, the International Federation of Medical Students Associations and the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, we have drawn up a document entitled "Ethical principles of health care in times of armed conflict and other emergencies". Those organizations today represent 30 million health-care professionals from the civilian and military realms, who now have a practical tool to guide them in their daily work.

Several members of the Council already know first-hand how we work because we have built jointly with them a constructive relationship of deep operational engagement, feedback, dialogue and corrective measures with regard to the conduct of hostilities. I am here today not to cry outrage, but to offer the ICRC's help and constructive engagement to move out of the deep contemporary crisis of health systems in armed conflicts. I would like to propose to the Council five work streams to ensure that the resolution that was adopted today is not only text but also a spirit that is respected in the middle of war.

First, we should align domestic legislation and encourage other States to follow suit, in line with obligations under international law and with ethical principles of the medical sector. Secondly, military personnel should be trained to minimize disruptions to health-care services, while safeguarding legitimate security concerns. Thirdly, local health-care organizations should be supported to maintain minimum service through specific and tailor-made solutions. Fourthly, the legal protection for patients and health-care workers should be improved by ensuring the proper use of protective emblems, enhancing legal protection for medical ethics and addressing violations. And fifthly, we must ensure that every weapons transfer is done with an assurance to respect international humanitarian and targeted trainings that focus on the protection of medical personnel and facilities.

As an organization working on the front lines of conflicts, we take resolution 2286 (2016) as a critically important political signal and as an encouragement to bear fruit on the ground. As a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian actor, we are aware that ours cannot be the task to use the resolution, or international humanitarian law in general, as part of a public argument indicting counterparts for violations of norms. Front-line negotiations will need skilled negotiators seeking the consent of parties in order to create an environment in which the key objectives of the resolution can be concretized and implemented through practical agreements amongst belligerents. We need to be cognizant of the tension between the political guidance that the Council is offering today on such an important issue and the practical challenges in contexts of war that frame the work of humanitarian actors on the ground. That is an additional reason, should we need one, that a regular exchange between the Council and front-line organizations like MSF and the ICRC are of such critical importance.

I told the Council about the destroyed hospital that I saw in Syria a few months ago. What I did not say is that since its destruction, doctors, nurses and volunteers continue to work in the basement of the hospital. Once a space to stock materials, it has been transformed into a micro-version of a hospital. In one former storage room, premature babies lie in a few generator-powered incubators that were not demolished by shelling. The hospital may be all but destroyed, but humanity still lives on.

Humanity in war is what we demand. As we said earlier, at the ICRC even wars have limits because wars without limits are wars without ends. Health-care personnel and facilities are the outer frontier of those

limits. Today, with the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the Council has reaffirmed the relevance of the laws of war and the basic humanitarian consensus enshrined in the Geneva Conventions. To demand that they be respected through practical measures is the most decisive next step the Council can take to ensure that humanity in war is a reality and not just an ideal.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Maurer for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Liu.

Ms. Liu: Wednesday's air strikes obliterated Al-Quds Hospital in Aleppo. They blew apart at least 55 men, women and children. An air strike killed one of the last remaining paediatricians in the city: a murderous air strike.

There were almost 300 air strikes in Aleppo over the past 10 days. Civilians, often in crowds, were repeatedly struck. What are individuals in wars today — expendable commodities, dead or alive? Patients and doctors have become legitimate targets. Women, children, the sick, the wounded and their caregivers are condemned to death. Stop those attacks.

I went to Kunduz, Afghanistan, following the United States attack on our trauma centre on 3 October 2015. One of the survivors, a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) nurse whose left arm was blown off during the relentless air strike, told me something that haunts me daily. He said that, when fighting erupted in Kunduz, MSF staff were told that its trauma centre was a safe place. Over and over again, we said that. He told me,

> "We believed you, but did you know that we would be bombed?"

I told him that until 3 October I truly believed that the hospital was a safe place. I cannot say that anymore about any medical facilities on the front lines today.

In Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, the Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen hospitals are routinely bombed, raided, looted or burned to the ground. Medical personnel are threatened. Patients are shot in their beds. Broad attacks on communities and precise attacks on health facilities are described as mistakes, are denied outright or are simply met with silence. In reality, they amount to massive, indiscriminate and disproportionate civilian targeting in urban settings and, in the worst cases, they are acts of terror. The effects of attacks against health facilities go far beyond those immediately killed and injured. They serve to demolish routine and life-saving health care for all. They make life impossible, full stop.

On 26 October 2015, a Saudi-led coalition air strike hit an MSF hospital in the Haydan district in northern Yemen, leaving at least 200,000 people without life-saving care. It was the first of three MSF facilities partially or completely destroyed in Yemen during a period of three months.

Attacks on MSF facilities provide only a glimpse into the brutality of war. Attacks on other hospitals and clinics, as well as schools, markets and houses of worship, are routine. Local health workers bear the brunt of those abuses. We are at a deadly impasse. We can no longer assume that fully functioning hospitals — in which patients are fighting for their lives — are out of bounds. Hospitals and patients have been dragged onto the battlefield.

In Jasin, a town in southern Syria, citizens have protested in front of a hospital to prevent its reopening. They know what happens to functioning hospitals. We are facing an epidemic of attacks on health facilities, impeding our ability to do our core work. To date, our calls for independent investigations have gone unheeded. Accountability begins with independent and impartial fact-finding. Perpetrators cannot be investigators, judges or juries.

Make no mistake: we will relentlessly denounce attacks on health care. We will speak out loudly and with force about what we witness in the field. Medicine must not be a deadly occupation. Patients must not be attacked or slaughtered in their beds. As physicians, we take an oath when we join the medical profession to treat everybody, every individual, regardless of who they are and regardless of their religion, their race or on which side they may fight — even if they are wounded combatants or if they are labelled as criminals or terrorists.

Hospitals must not be attacked or forcibly entered by armed personnel, including to search for and capture patients. To turn our backs on those basic principles is to turn our backs on the foundation of medical ethics. Medical ethics cannot be buried by war. The neutrality of wartime medical care cannot be stamped out by State sovereignty or domestic law, especially in an age of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency characterized by shifting alliances and murky rules

of engagement. While the nature of warfare may have changed, the rules of war have not.

The Council is charged with protecting peace and security. Yet four of the five permanent members of the Council have, in varying degrees, been associated with coalitions responsible for attacks on health-care structures during the past year. Those include the NATO-led coalition in Afghanistan, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and the Russian-backed, Syrian-led coalition. The Council therefore must live up to its extraordinary responsibilities and set an example for all States. I repeat: stop those attacks.

The discussion here today cannot amount to empty rhetoric. Resolution 2286 (2016) cannot end up like so many others, including those passed on Syria over the last five years, which have been routinely violated with impunity.

Health care in Syria is systematically targeted and besieged areas are cynically denied medical care. I exhort the Council to uphold its obligations, ensure the protection of the impartial provision of health care in conflict, and support health workers in fulfilling their obligations to treat every sick and wounded person without discrimination. Dr. Maas, the paediatrician murdered in Aleppo last week, was killed for saving lives. Today, we remember his humanity and bravery, which he shared with so many patients, nurses, doctors, communities and MSF staff caught up in areas of conflict. For their sake, the Council must translate this resolution into action. It must recommit unambiguously to the norms that govern the conduct of war. This resolution must lead to all States and non-State actors stopping the carnage.

Council members must also pressure their allies to end attacks on health care and populations in conflict areas. We will not leave patients behind, and we will not be silent. Seeking or providing health care must not be a death sentence. The Security Council will be judged not on its words today, but on its actions. The Council's work has only begun. I urge it to make resolution 2286 (2016) save lives.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Liu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): It is very difficult to be the first speaker after having heard sobering stores and strong appeals from the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), but I will try my best.

My delegation is very proud to have worked with other authors in the preparation of resolution 2286 (2016), which we adopted this morning: Egypt, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay. I also thank the many Member States that have joined us as sponsors of the resolution. I am very happy to note that there are 19 sponsors from the Asia-Pacific Group. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, led by Switzerland, as well as the initiative taken by Uruguay as President of the Security Council in the month of January to hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV. 7606).

The Geneva Conventions provide that medical personnel and medical facilities shall be respected and protected at all times. Therefore, they shall not be the object of attack. There is no room for argument on this point. Today's resolution does not focus on any specific conflict areas. However, I have to say that the situation in Syria, in particular in Aleppo, vividly illustrates the importance of this issue.

Despite this universally accepted legal principle, medical personnel and medical facilities are exposed to attacks in armed conflicts, and the situations are getting worse. In its effort to tackle this question of compliance with international humanitarian law, the Security Council adopted resolution 2175 (2014), which aims to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. However, as the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer of the ICRC and Ms. Liu of MSF brought out in detail, attacks against medical personnel and medical facilities are considerably increasing. To add but one example, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNICEF documented 125 incidents affecting access to health care in Afghanistan in 2015, which included 20 health workers killed, 43 injured and 66 abducted. That is more than double the number of incidents in 2014, which was 59.

Facing this grave situation, we believed it urgent and necessary to adopt a resolution focusing exclusively on the protection of medical personnel and medical facilities. I was very pleased to witness the unanimous adoption of the resolution today. Resolution 2286 (2016) sends a strong message from the Council

condemning attacks on medical personnel and facilities and demanding that all parties to armed conflict ensure respect and protection for these personnel and facilities.

The next step is the implementation of the resolution by the international community. All States Members of the United Nations should demonstrate their commitment to strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law. In this context, I would like to see further deliberation on the comprehensive mechanisms to encourage relevant parties to undertake such compliance. Although this subject was discussed intensively at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva last December, we failed to reach an agreement. I hope that viable mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law could be established in the near future through an inclusive process.

With resolution 2286 (2016), the Security Council strongly urges States to develop effective measures to prevent attacks against medical personnel through the development of domestic legal frameworks. This, I understand, is ICRC President Maurer's number-one proposal. I believe that this approach would lead to ending impunity and ensure accountability. In this regard, I wish to share with the Council that Japan has provided assistance to such countries as Myanmar, Cambodia and Iraq, for the purposes of developing domestic legal frameworks by sending experts and conducting training programmes. The role of States with influence on the ground is of particular importance for the effective implementation of today's resolution. The role of the Secretary-General to alert the Council on any obstructions or acts of violence is also important.

I wish to conclude by paying tribute to all the humanitarian personnel who are working under very serious circumstances of conflict and by stating that Japan will continue to play an active role in the area of humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): We would like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for their briefings. I also want to pay tribute to the workers of the ICRC and MSF and other humanitarian organizations for the very difficult work that they do.

The adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) comes at a time when health-care workers and facilities are, quite literally, under fire in a number of current conflicts, most of which are on the Security Council's agenda. In Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, hospitals and other medical facilities have been attacked by parties to armed conflict. Health-care workers have been killed and injured, kidnapped, harassed and intimidated for carrying out their medical duties.

Urgently needed medical supplies have been routinely blocked or removed from aid convoys by protagonists who have sought to deny access to health care in order to achieve military objectives. This alarming trend shows no sign of abating as the attacks on medical facilities in and around Aleppo starkly illustrate. The consequences of such actions are measured not only in the immediate loss of human life but also in the longer-term disruption to health-care systems that are often already severely overstretched. The destruction of one hospital can affect the delivery of health-care services to tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people. Such consequences endure well beyond the end of hostilities.

The Council has spoken today with one voice to deliver a firm response to this growing global problem. We are shining a light on behaviour that is becoming all too prevalent, but should not be happening. The law is clear and so is our message. The wounded and sick, medical personnel, facilities, transport and equipment must be respected and protected. The delivery of medical assistance must not be obstructed. It is that simple.

Resolution 2286 (2016) unequivocally condemns attacks on health-care workers and health-care facilities. It reaffirms the laws of armed conflict that recognize the protected status of medical missions, the sick and the wounded. It recalls key international humanitarian law principles of distinction and precaution and the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks. It stresses the need for medical personnel to be able to uphold their professional codes of ethics, including the duty to provide impartial care. It demands that parties to armed conflict facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical personnel, their equipment, transport and supplies to all in need. Let us be clear: those legal requirements already exist. Some of them are among the oldest rules of international humanitarian law. The problem is one of respect and compliance.

On the practical side, the resolution emphasises the importance of education and training in applicable international humanitarian law and its integration into the practice of armed forces. It also stresses the need to end impunity and urges States to take action to ensure accountability.

As Mr. Maurer has pointed out, modern warfare, as we are seeing played out in Syria and elsewhere, makes it all the more important that international humanitarian law be respected. We fully endorse the call for principled pragmatism in its application.

Importantly, today's resolution requests the Secretary-General to brief the Council annually on the implementation of the resolution. New Zealand hopes to see the participation of relevant organizations and civil society at those briefings.

As Ms. Liu has told us, our work today on this issue is only just beginning. We expect her and the International Committee of the Red Cross to hold us to account.

Today's resolution is also significant from a working methods perspective. Five elected members cooperated in developing the text. Close consultation with all Council members and openness to negotiation enabled its unanimous adoption. Key stakeholders, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontiéres, were also closely engaged in the process. We are grateful for their support.

Lastly, let me pay tribute to my Deputy, Mrs. Carolyn Schwalger, and her team for their leadership on this initiative.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for being with us today. I say this very sincerely because I think that, among the people in the Chamber, he is one of the ones who has travelled the most and who has witnessed the abuses that have been committed against hospitals and doctors in different parts of the world. I therefore think it is excellent that he is with us today.

I also thank the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It was a pleasure to work with him when he was an Ambassador at the United Nations. It is also a pleasure to see how effectively he leads that organization and that he fully appreciates what it means to negotiate a Security Council resolution. I also thank Ms. Joanne Liu for her impressive and heartfelt briefing, which really touched us. In addition, I thank and pay tribute to our experts from the Permanent Mission of Spain for their hard work leading up to the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016).

In January 2015, a warplane dropped 13 cluster bombs on a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Frandala, which served 150 people at that time. Council members may ask why I start by mentioning that example. It is very simple: because my country had just joined the Security Council and the news of that event affected us very strongly. We have now completed two thirds of our term in the Security Council. Throughout that time there has not been a single day when there was not an attack against doctors or hospitals in different places around the world. The first news I read upon waking up this morning was about an attack against a hospital in Aleppo. That attack has already been condemned by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such attacks are so frequent that, unfortunately, we will wind up becoming used to them, and yet we should have zero tolerance for them. There is no reason, no circumstance, that can justify an attack against a hospital. In any conflict situation, clinics and health centres make their location known to combatants. Just a few days ago I heard Stephen O'Brien say that, for civilians in a conflict situation, the most dangerous thing was to live near a medical centre (see S/PV.7682). That is a sad truth, because hospitals often maintain open channels of communication, including with terrorists when necessary.

Some attacks are caused by technical mistakes or human error. In those cases, the equipment, the training and the rules of engagement need to be adapted so that those kinds of mistakes can be avoided in the future. However, other attacks are absolutely deliberate. That is why the resolution calls for investigating incidents and taking measures against the perpetrators. The Syrian soldier who steals surgical equipment from a medical convoy in broad daylight has to know that one day he will face trial. Doctors in Aleppo today are forced to work underground because they are aware that their lives are hanging by a thread. We need to change that situation, acknowledge the sacrifices they are making and not be afraid to demand accountability from those who are responsible.

The resolution envisions other aspects of medical assistance in conflict that may not receive as much attention in the media. We lack a lot of information. There is no detailed picture of all the attacks that are committed against doctors and hospitals around the

world. We all know, for example, that there have been multiple air strikes against hospitals in various parts of Yemen since the hostilities began more than year ago. However, what is less known are the kidnappings of the personnel of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which unfortunately occur more frequently than we think, whether it be in Yemen and the rest of the Middle East, Somalia or the Sahel. We also need to make sure that we uphold the ban on punishing doctors for simply fulfilling their mandate. I will explain a bit more. As we heard earlier, the doctor of your enemy is not your enemy.

In drafting this resolution we had the privilege of getting to know better the specialized organizations that are dedicated to providing medical assistance in dangerous areas. They are idealistic, but they do not expect miracles. We were also surprised by the pragmatism of the two briefers. They only request was that everyone comply with the rules of the game, because even war has a minimum set of rules that need to be respected. Today's briefers are ready to do whatever it takes. I noticed one very apposite phrase uttered by Joanne Liu today that I think everyone probably remembers, "We will not leave patients behind". Thank God for that statement and for everything that it signifies.

That is why we welcome the fact that resolution 2286 (2016) enjoyed the sponsorhip of no less than 85 States. We interpret each one of those sponsorships as silent support for the thousands of doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers who, while we are meeting here, are saving lives in the most difficult circumstances in various corners of the planet. They certainly deserve the moral and political recognition of the Security Council. They also deserve that the Security Council review at least once a year the measures taken to improve their protection.

In conclusion, Spain would like to thank the members of the Council who have supported this initiative — our travel companions — above all, Egypt, Japan, New Zealand and Uruguay, which helped draft the resolution, as well as the five other elected members of the Council, who were the first to add their names to the resolution. I would also like to thank the five permanent members of the Council, which participated actively in the negotiations and will play an essential role in implementing the resolution. We often use the term "constructive engagement". Sometimes it appears to have somewhat lost its meaning. In this case, it really describes very aptly the spirit that has guided the negotiations on resolution 2286 (2016). It involved a true team effort, and I am sure that the actual implementation of this resolution will also be a team effort.

Allow me at the very end to express personal gratitude to my team, to Counsellor Alejandra del Río Novo and Counsellor Mrs. Maria Palacios Pallacios, who have worked for weeks behind the scenes in the negotiations on this resolution. I would also like to thank my Egyptian colleague, because I cannot imagine a better way to start a presidency.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to express our satisfaction at the presence of the Secretary-General in the Chamber. More specifically, we acknowledge the presence of the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the international president of Médecins Sans Frontières, Ms. Joanne Liu. In their individual briefings, they not only provided useful perspectives but also eloquent accounts that spoke volumes about the situation that we hope resolution 2286 (2016) will bring some influence to bear on.

We must remember that the adoption of the resolution by members of the Security Council and the many delegations that co-sponsored it are also signs of the commitment of States Members of the United Nations to abide by their obligations and deliver on them. However, we must also be mindful that many events, if not the majority of them, that we are trying to address through this resolution involve violations that have been perpetrated by the armed forces of some Member States of this Organization. We hope, therefore, that this will not be just another empty exercise where we make commitments that will then fall by the wayside.

We are very concerned that both human rights and international humanitarian law are being continuously violated and ignored with total impunity in many regions of the world. The current asymmetric conflicts, involving many opposing parties, including non-State actors, make it all the more necessary today for humanitarian personnel, who carry out medical tasks in war zones, to be protected. However, the deliberate targeting of such personnel and their health facilities has become a distinctive tragic aspect of the current conflicts, as those personnel and facilities find themselves becoming increasingly vulnerable.

As previous speakers have said, in the recent past we have observed with alarm and concern the sinister and growing trend of attacks against hospitals and medical personnel, which is a scourge in those areas ravaged by violence. Such attacks very often occur within a framework of growing impunity for violations of international humanitarian law. Thousands of people are left defenceless, threatening the lives of humanitarian personnel, who are performing medical tasks with dedication and selflessness by providing health services to populations trapped in conflict areas and providing a glimpse of humanity amidst the cruelties of war. The attacks and bombings against medical facilities in South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and other places, which have been reported in the international news, demonstrate that those attacks can occur in any part in the world that is beset by war.

Respect for international law, which frames international humanitarian law, is a guiding principle for my country's foreign policy. For Uruguay, attacks and violence against medical facilities and medical personnel in the context of conflict, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, are totally reprehensible and unacceptable. Those who are responsible must be held accountable, sooner or later. We believe that the Security Council and its members have an important role to play and a moral and legal responsibility to do everything in their power to ensure that situations involving the violations of the most basic human rights and international humanitarian law are not repeated.

In that regard, and together with Egypt, Spain, Japan and New Zealand, we engaged in an intense round of consultations that culminated in the introduction of this resolution, based on the conviction that the current situation facing the international community requires effective measures to prevent such unacceptable acts. Many of us welcome the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), and we can only hope that it will be useful for the protection and security of the organizations that are providing medical and humanitarian assistance on the ground.

I must, in conclusion, render homage to the humanitarian personnel who are carrying out medical tasks with great courage and total dedication. Many of them have sacrificed their own lives to carry out their work and to save the lives of many other human beings trapped in those armed conflicts.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking the Secretary-General, the president of the International Committee for the Red Cross and the international president of Médecins Sans Frontières for their important briefings today. The Chamber is far removed from the harrowing realities that their presidents have just described and that their organizations have sadly experienced at first hand. I pay tribute to their bravery and to that of their colleagues. It is vital that we hear from all of them on issues as important as this.

The United Kingdom welcomes today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) and the work of Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay in preparing it. Coming three weeks ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, it is a clear signal on the part of the Council of the vital need for respect for international humanitarian law, for the protection of civilians and for accountability for those who fail to show that respect or protection.

Medical facilities and personnel have clear protection under humanitarian law. However, as we have heard, it is sadly repeatedly necessary to demand compliance with those obligations, as we are doing through today's resolution. Respect for medical neutrality is a tradition that has existed for hundreds of years, but it is slowly unravelling before our very eyes. The red cross or crescent symbol that adorns a hospital or ambulance has become a target, whether in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan or Afghanistan. A hospital must be a safe place, not a target. An ambulance must be a sign of hope, not a target. A doctor or nurse must be a ray of light, not a target. The doctors of Aleppo know that all too well, as the Secretary-General himself reminded us and as is shown by the reports today of yet another attack on a hospital there.

In a joint letter issued last week, seven Syrian doctors described the bombing of the Al-Quds hospital, which killed at least 50 people and injured 60 more. It was the third such attack on the hospital since the conflict began. "The city is bleeding", they wrote. They went on to say that their friends, the White Helmets, continue to pull bodies out from the rubble, that those attacking Aleppo have no regard for the sanctity of life or humanity and that soon there will be no medical professionals at all.

In a war seemingly without end and without rules or limits, it is sometimes hard to be shocked. But when

a city — no, an entire country — is bleeding, it is sickening to see doctors and nurses, the people who can staunch that bleeding, being killed and maimed. In that attack, a leading Syrian paediatrician, Dr. Muhammed Wassim Maas, was killed. To those who knew him, he was the bravest and kindest of souls. His devotion to treating the war's youngest victims was unparalleled. By day he worked in the children's hospital; at night he responded to emergencies at the Al-Quds hospital. As his friend Dr. Hatem put it so poignantly on Facebook this week, he was killed for saving lives. Dr. Maas should have been supported and protected, even celebrated. Instead, he was killed while trying to save others. And his story is just one of hundreds to be found in Syria.

Over the past five years, the civil-society group Physicians for Human Rights has recorded 730 killings and 359 attacks on medical facilities. That are three medical workers killed every week and a medical facility attacked every five days. At the same time, we have seen medical equipment and surgical supplies diverted away from opposition areas. In February, the Syrian regime denied entry to besieged areas to 80,000 medical items, and to 19,000 in March. The regime is also stopping urgent medical evacuations from those areas. The consequences are horrifying: two children injured in a landmine explosion in Bukkin died after being denied the evacuation they desperately needed.

Taken together, that amounts to nothing less than a systematic campaign against medical workers and the entire health-care system in Syria. We all know who is responsible. The Al-Assad regime has killed Syrian civilians time and again. Time and again, it has killed medical workers trying to save those civilians. Time and again, it has flouted its obligations under international humanitarian law. If Russia genuinely believes in the commitment that we have all just made to protecting medical workers, it must bring its full influence to bear to restrain the Al-Assad regime and bring its merciless attacks to an end.

Today's resolution sends the important message that the Council will not tolerate attacks on any medical workers or their facilities. We now have to live up to the standards that we have just committed to. Let us start today. The Council has a responsibility to respond to horrific attacks such as the one on the Al-Quds hospital that took the life of Dr. Maas and so many others. Aleppo is burning, and its civilians are being killed. We therefore request that the Secretary-General give an urgent, open briefing in this Chamber on the situation there. We look to you, Mr. President, and to the Secretariat, to convene such a briefing as a top priority.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Since this is the first public meeting to be held under your presidency, Sir, I would first like to congratulate you and the delegation of Egypt on your assumption of the presidency and your convening of today's very timely briefing on the critical issue of the protection of civilians, with particular emphasis on medical and humanitarian personnel, hospitals and other medical facilities. I would also like to welcome and thank the Secretary-General, who was here earlier, as well as Ambassador Peter Maurer of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Joanne Liu of Médecins Sans Frontières — the organization that is present in so many of the theatres that we have heard about this morning and that is doing what we would like to see many more doing, not just the 35,000 who are its members, as Ms. Liu pointed out this morning.

Angola is honoured to be a sponsor, along with other States, of resolution 2286 (2016), which we just adopted today.

Attacks on medical and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties and on their means of transport and equipment, as well as on hospitals and other medical facilities, are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law as enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, as well as the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol. Today's resolution also represents a meaningful contribution to making the parties to conflicts aware of the gravity of such attacks and making their perpetrators accountable for their criminal deeds, which are in absolute contravention of international law. At the same time, the resolution also strengthens the United Nations agenda on the protection of civilians.

Since the Security Council's adoption of its first resolution on the protection of civilians (resolution 1265 (1999)), it has emphasized the importance of protecting humanitarian and health-care personnel in various country-specific and thematic resolutions. However, despite the robust normative framework established by the Council, the General Assembly and other international bodies, and the strengthening

of human rights mandates in peacekeeping missions, a great deficit remains in the protection of civilians in situations of rampant conflict. Today's adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) helps to fill that gap. Now is time to proceed with the implementation of the resolution.

We are deeply concerned by reports highlighting attacks on health-care workers and medical facilities in conflict zones. Shootings, kidnappings, physical violence and aerial bombardments are a part of daily life in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Yemen, among others. This year the number of attacks on medical facilities, as well as the number of deceased, increase daily in a rampage of irrationality.

Ms. Joanne Liu and Mr. Peter Maurer have shared with the Council sobering stories of the prevailing reality in a number of conflict zones. The appeal they have launched and presented to the Council should be, without a doubt, enough for us to heed and respond positively. The recent death in Aleppo of Dr. Wassim Maas, a humanitarian hero and the last paediatrician in the city who, with his bare hands, struggled to give some hope to the children of the martyrized city, bears witness to that.

In conclusion, we condemn all attacks on health-care and humanitarian workers and facilities for their disadvantageous impact on people in need, who have their access to health care and humanitarian assistance totally obliterated. We call on all parties to armed conflicts to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, and to ensure the respect and protection of all medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities. We urge parties to the conflict to facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian workers and their access to all people in need of protection and assistance. That would be an adequate response to the appeal we heard this morning in the Council.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to congratulate Egypt on its assumption of the presidency for the month of May.

It was our honour to co-sponsor resolution 2286 (2016), which was just adopted. We are grateful to the delegations of Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay for their timely initiative, as well as for taking on board Ukraine's proposals.

We thank the Secretary-General for his valuable contribution to our debate. However, our main thanks should go to today's briefers. We highly appreciate the work their staff has been doing for years.

Although the protection of civilians in armed conflict has become an increasingly complex challenge, this complexity must not in any way dissuade us from our collective efforts to address the issue. Armed conflicts inflict all kinds of hardship and suffering on civilians. It is our deeply held conviction that all sides in conflicts have both a legal and a fundamental moral obligation to provide all possible medical care for the sick and injured, as well as to protect medical personnel, who often put themselves in harm's way to save lives.

Yet, in today's conflicts hospitals are increasingly becoming common targets. When medical facilities come under shelling or bombs, it is an unspeakable tragedy. When they are attacked on purpose, it is an example of abhorrent barbarism that has to be combatted in our presumably civilized times. What is really horrific is that the number of such instances continue to grow. We are seeing it happen in Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere. Especially worrying is the situation in Syria, where there have been dozens, if not hundreds, of attacks against medical facilities. In the past six months that trend has only gotten worse.

Last week's attacks on the Al-Quds hospital in Aleppo reminded us of the enormous difficulties and dangers that health workers face every day. Two doctors, including the only paediatrician in the city, three medical support staff and dozens of patients, among them children, lost their lives in this horrific incident. It cannot be left without reflection. Therefore, we fully support the request just made by the delegation of the United Kingdom for a briefing on Aleppo. It speaks volumes about the horrendous humanitarian situation in Syria and the complete disregard for all relevant norms of international humanitarian law.

Attacks on medical facilities are a blatant violation of international law. Strict and long-established norms of international law provide for an absolute inviolability of medical facilities and workers in conflict zones. Physicians for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization that documents and advocates against mass atrocities and severe human rights violations around the world, reported 16 attacks on Syrian hospitals in October 2015 alone. According to that

organization's data, since 2011 at least 610 medical personnel have been killed in Syria. Furthermore, 183 medical facilities in that country have been the targets of military attacks on 233 occasions.

The World Health Organization reports that more than 99 health facilities, including hospitals and clinics, have been damaged or destroyed in Yemen. Attacks on health facilities and personnel in Afghanistan have risen 50 per cent in the past year, as per data of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reports that in 2015, health workers and institutions in this country were subjected to arbitrary searches by Government forces, threats from armed groups, looting and abductions.

It is of utmost importance that those responsible for such war crimes be held accountable. Ukraine calls on all States to cooperate fully with existing international criminal justice institutions, including the International Criminal Court, to combat impunity and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

The terrible statistics I have just mentioned make the resolution adopted today all the more topical. The Security Council is uniquely positioned to send a strong message concerning this problem. That is why we hope that resolution 2286 (2016) will serve as a clear political signal to all parties concerned that the Security Council will remain extremely vigilant on the issue of the protection of humanitarian, medical and health-care workers and medical facilities in situations of armed conflict. As Ms. Liu so emotionally put it only moments ago, we should make this resolution save lives.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Since this is the first official meeting of the Security Council in May, we would like to start by thanking the delegation of China for its skilful and effective leadership as President during the month of April. We would also like to congratulate our Egyptian colleagues on the start of their presidency, and wish them every success this month.

We welcome the initiative to convene this meeting and wish to thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, Ms. Joanne Liu, for their participation in this meeting and their contribution to this discussion.

Protecting humanitarian personnel, including medical personnel, is one of the most important aspects of the whole issue of protecting civilians. The provision of medical assistance to those affected by armed conflict has become not only one of the most sorely needed activities, but also one of the most dangerous. The Security Council has more than once called on parties to armed conflict to comply strictly with the provisions of international humanitarian law and to take all necessary steps to ensure the security of those who provide humanitarian and medical assistance to affected populations. This idea is also invoked in resolution 2286 (2016), which we have just adopted. There is no doubt that we need to consider this issue in the broader context of conflict resolution and of the tasks facing the Security Council in this area.

In examining the issue of the security of medical facilities and personnel, all United Nations bodies, including, of course, the Security Council, must be guided by fully verified, reliable information. In this context, it is particularly important that the reports of the Secretary-General to be submitted in accordance with the resolution we have just adopted include only verified and reliable information. It is unacceptable that unverified reports of attacks against hospitals taken from unreliable sources are fed to the media and then used for political pressure for short-term objectives. In particular, we are not able to corroborate the accusations levelled against the Russian air force of violations of international humanitarian law in Syria.

The key responsibility for protecting humanitarian personnel and other individuals entitled to special protection under the Geneva Convention of 1949 lies with the parties to armed conflict, which have the primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of the civilian population. However, we occasionally witness brutal disregard for the norms of international law, which stipulate that hospitals that provide assistance to those who are suffering can under no circumstances be the targets of attacks. To this can be added the dispiriting numbers of murders, attacks and abductions against medical workers carried out by terrorist organizations, especially the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham.

What is particularly unacceptable is when medical personnel suffer at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them. Late last year, for example, owing to the indiscriminate use of force, Médecins Sans Frontières hospitals were damaged in different cities of Yemen. In October 2015, there was an air strike against a Médecins

Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, in Afghanistan, and similar attacks have occurred in other countries.

So far we have not been able to significantly improve the security of humanitarian and medical personnel, including doctors, who are working in dangerous conditions. Against this backdrop, additional efforts must be made by States Members of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to strengthen mechanisms aimed at ensuring the protection of such personnel.

We must also remember the high degree of responsibility that medical personnel bear vis-à-vis society. Often people's lives depend on their work. An important precondition for the effective protection of humanitarian organizations and medical staff is compliance with the guiding principles of international humanitarian cooperation, as enshrined in the resolutions of the General Assembly. These include respect for sovereignty, neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence. There is no doubt that medical workers who find themselves in conflict areas must respect the laws and customs of the host country and strictly adhere to the ethics and standards of the medical profession. Abiding by these rules will help ensure that medical workers are able to carry out their tasks in a well-defined, effective and safe manner.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I wish to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Maurer and Ms. Liu for their briefings.

Let me first of all express my deep appreciation and respect for the critical, life-saving work that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) do around the world. We also thank the penholders of unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016) for focusing the Council's attention on the importance of protecting medical personnel and access to medical care in armed conflict.

At the outset, it is important to be clear: all those who are engaged exclusively in medical work must be respected and protected as civilians, regardless of their affiliation. The United States strongly supports efforts to safeguard access to medical care in situations of armed conflict. We also support efforts to increase awareness of the international laws that provide legal protection for medical personnel as well as medical facilities and transportation in conflict situations.

I would like to focus my comments today on practical ways of protecting medical care in conflict and on the human consequences of the attacks in Syria, where we see the most egregious examples of attacks on medical facilities and personnel. But first let me take a moment to state up front that United States deeply regrets the tragic and mistaken attack on the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, last October. I would like to echo the words of President Obama and once again express our profound condolences in connection with the Afghan medical professionals and other civilians killed or injured in the tragic attack. United States forces are prohibited from targeting protected medical facilities, and United States forces are committed to complying with the international humanitarian law principles that protect hospitals and medical staff caring for patients, including wounded combatants in conflict zones.

As the Council is aware, the Pentagon, following a six-month investigation of the incident in Kunduz, has disciplined 16 service members for mistakes that led to the tragedy, including the suspension of an officer from command. The disciplinary action taken highlights the seriousness with which we take this incident. This tragedy was the direct result of human error, compounded by systems and procedural failures, and United States forces will learn from this incident, study what went wrong and take the necessary steps to prevent any such tragic incidents in future.

As some in this Chamber may recall, one of the worst recorded cases of assault on the wounded and the sick occurred in November 1991, in the Croatian town of Vukovar. The same day the ICRC secured agreement on the neutral status of the hospital, 300 patients and their relatives were forced onto buses. The bodies of 200 of them were later found in a mass grave, and 51 are still missing today. Despite the outcry that this event generated more than 20 years ago, we have seen similar instances of targeted violence against patients and medical workers in countless conflicts since then. Unfortunately, many instances occurred only last month.

Nowhere has the increasing trend of attacks on medical personnel, facilities and transportation been more apparent than in Syria, where such attacks are overwhelmingly carried out by the regime. The Commission of Inquiry recently reported that targeting hospitals and medical personnel as well as the denial of access to medical care remain ingrained

features of the Syrian conflict. Last week, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien told the Council that the presence of a hospital or health facility is now perceived by neighbours to be a threat to their safety. For instance, of the 33 hospitals open in Aleppo City in 2010, fewer than 10 are reportedly still functioning. Just last week, we all heard the report of the horrific attack by the Syrian regime on Al-Quds hospital in Aleppo, a hospital supported by both MSF and the ICRC. Reports suggest that at least 27 people died in the attack, including one of the last paediatricians in Aleppo City, as the Secretary-General and others have noted, along with a dentist and a nurse. The Al-Quds attack came the day after a Syrian civil defence station in the town of Al-Atareb, Aleppo province, was struck five times, tragically killing five members of the civil defence, a humanitarian and first-responder group most commonly known as the White Helmets. Both of these attacks came a week after targeted attacks on a cardiologist in Hama, Dr. Hassan Al-Araj, and another physician in Zabadani, Dr. Mohammed Al-Khous. It is clear that the regime has been targeting medical facilities and personnel. We are also concerned by the report of today's attack on the Al-Dabit hospital, on which we are still gathering information, and we are saddened by the deaths resulting from that attack.

I regret to say that all of these attacks on medical workers and facilities took place in April alone. Today in Syria, according to several organizations. over 725 physicians in the country have been killed and over 350 attacks on medical facilities have taken place, the vast majority of them at the hands of the regime. In fact, from January through March, including during an agreed cessation of hostilities, Physicians for Human Rights documented 13 attacks on medical facilities and the deaths of 25 medical personnel. Syrian Government forces were responsible for 12 of the attacks and 24 of the deaths. Allies of the Al-Assad regime, including Russia, have an urgent responsibility to press the regime to fulfil its commitments under resolution 2254 (2015) to stop attacking civilians, medical facilities and first responders and to abide fully by the cessation of hostilities. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, too, has directed multiple bombings of medical centres, including the triple bombing of a clinic in Tel Tamer, in Al-Hasakah governorate, that killed more than 50 civilians on 10 December 2015.

We are also deeply concerned by the devastating toll of the crisis in Yemen. Throughout the Yemen conflict, we have urged all sides to take all feasible steps to avoid doing harm to civilians and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of medical personnel and facilities. We continually remind the parties in Yemen of their obligations under international humanitarian law not to direct attacks against protected hospitals or places where the sick and wounded are present. Impartial humanitarian organizations must be allowed to continue their critical work of saving lives, free from threats from armed groups.

Let me conclude by saying that we commend the tireless efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Committee of the Red Cross to promote practical ways that parties to armed conflicts can better protect medical personnel and facilities through the establishment of deconfliction systems. Establishing humanitarian deconfliction systems allows humanitarian organizations to submit geolocation data to parties to the conflict. Parties to any conflict share the responsibility for ensuring that such data is effectively incorporated into no-strike lists.

For the United States, one result of the Kunduz investigation was to set out a number of operational improvements that have been made as a result of that accident, including the preloading of key information regarding targets onto aircraft systems. However, we must all do more to improve the protection of medical personnel and hospitals in armed conflict. With respect to Syria specifically, we call again on Russia and other allies of the Syrian regime to use all their influence to stop the regime's deliberate targeting of medical professionals and facilities. With the deeply concerning increase in violence in Aleppo, we support the United Kingdom recommendation for an open meeting on the situation there.

We look forward to the Secretary-General's recommendations on preventive measures. We hope that this can be an ocassion, on the lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, for us to recommit collectively to the core principles of international humanitarian law, including those that protect medical personnel and hospitals.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Peter Maurer, and the International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Ms. Joanne Liu, for their briefings,

which were as moving as they were powerful and inspiring to us to act on our shared moral and political responsibility to implement resolution 2286 (2016), which we have just adopted unanimously. Allow me to commend the dedication and courage of the personnel of MSF and the ICRC, and of all health workers in the field who help the wounded and sick in increasingly difficult conditions and often at the risk of their lives.

Attacks on medical personnel and health infrastructure have increased in recent years in many countries at war — Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq, among others. In 2015 alone, 75 medical facilities supported by MSF were targeted. According to the World Health Organization, 654 medical personnel have been killed in Syria since the beginning of the war. This sad record is still growing. As has been noted today, last week the Al-Quds hospital in Aleppo was deliberately bombed by the Syrian regime. At least 20 civilians were killed, including one of the last pediatricians in the city, who sacrificed himself to save children. I offer a special tribute to local health workers who are the first victims of these violations of international humanitarian law. Who can accept that these men and women not only are killed as they save lives, but are deliberately targeted because they seek to save lives?

Faced with this unacceptable situation, the Council could not remain silent. Attacks on health personnel and medical facilities are contrary to international humanitarian law, as the President of the ICRC, whose mandate is based on the Geneva Conventions, reiterates relentlessly. We must thank him for that. Even war has its rules, as codified, inter alia, in 1949 by the Geneva Conventions, which apply to all parties and must be respected in all circumstances. France takes this opportunity to call on countries that have not yet ratified the additional protocols to do so. It is our collective responsibility to strengthen the protection of all medical personnel and health infrastructure in conflict zones. That is the meaning of the resolution we have just adopted, with the active contribution of France. I wish to warmly thank the sponsors for their collective initiative and ongoing efforts. I congratulate Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay.

In addition to the attacks on medical personnel and hospitals, the deprivation of care, including against civilians, is increasingly used by parties to conflict as a weapon of war. In Syria, medical kits are removed from humanitarian convoys. The regime's obstructions of the delivery of medical assistance have increased, despite the commitments made in the framework of the intra-Syrian negotiations. As emphasized in the resolution we have just adopted, access to care is a right guaranteed by the Geneva Conventions; it is not negotiable. Military hospitals are also used by the Damascus regime as detention centres where torture is practiced systematically as part of a deliberate State policy, as evidenced by the thousands of horrific photos from the Caesar file and the damning reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We cannot resign ourselves to the unacceptable.

Medical personnel cannot be effectively protected without the fight against impunity. States must prosecute and punish those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This requires the conduct of impartial and independent investigations, and bringing those responsable to justice. France recalls in this regard that attacks on hospitals, medical facilities or health workers can constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Ultimately, we must follow up our own decisions so that resolution 2286 (2016) is followed by tangible results on the ground and these unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law come to an end. In that regard, all the tools at our disposal must be mobilized.

To that end, the Council must be informed regularly and in detail about attacks on medical personnel and medical facilities. That is why France considers it necessary for the Council to be seized as soon as possible of the situation in Aleppo. That is true for all conflict situations where violations of the protection of medical personnel and infrastructure are committed. The resolution we have just adopted requests the Secretary-General to report regularly to the Security Council on its implementation. That important step will allow the Council to monitor this issue in a thorough, regular and ongoing manner. It will allow us above all to highlight and publicly disclose violations so that we can counter them with all the might of the law. This fight belongs to the Council and to France, and members can count on our total mobilization.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At this first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of May, Senegal would like to congratulate the brotherly country of Egypt on its assumption of the Council presidency for this month. I also commend China for its

outstanding conduct of our work in the month of April. This meeting is also an opportunity for me to welcome the leadership of Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay for having presented the text of resolution 2286 (2016), which is fully in line with the priorities of the delegation of Senegal. My country gives particular attention to the issue of health at this troubling moment. I also thank the Secretary-General and our briefers, namely, the Presidents of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of Médecins Sans Frontières, whose descriptions of the situation on the ground leave us all the more concerned, even though we continue to trust in the capacity of the international community to address the issue.

The resolution we have just adopted condemns attacks against civilian and medical personnel, equipment and their means of transport and medical infrastructure. It also demands that the parties to conflicts respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. Moreover, the resolution expresses the determination of the Council to include, wherever appropriate, the issue of protecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the mandates of peacekeeping missions. It also calls on the Secretary-General to provide recommendations on how to prevent such acts. In line with the importance it attaches to the issue of providing health care, Senegal welcomes the Council's decision to include that issue in peacekeeping mandates.

Senegal's determination to address the issue of health care is reflected in our participation in the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises, which includes Senegalese armed forces operating various field hospitals in a number of peacekeeping operations, which provide services for both uniformed personnel and civilians.

The Council's consideration of the issue of health care in armed conflict must also touch on the very serious issue of women and children in need of medical assistance. In that connection, on behalf of my delegation, I strongly condemn indiscriminate shelling, the use of car bombs, acts of terrorism, the dropping of barrel bombs and the use of famine as a weapon of war. Long involved in efforts aimed at ending obstetric fistulas, which is the goal of a draft resolution that my delegation traditionally introduces at the General Assembly, we condemn the placing of obstacles in the way of women accessing emergency obstetric services in countries in conflict, which is at the heart of the increased levels of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.

Given the delays that the Ebola epidemic produced for the peacebuilding processes in the affected countries, above and beyond the areas covered by today's resolution, the Council should take up the issue of health care in conflict situations in the most thorough way possible. Aware of the importance of the matter, Senegal's 2015 chairmanship of the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative — the Oslo Group, which, in addition to Southern African countries, includes Brazil, France, Indonesia, Norway and Thailand — focused on improving ways to address international health emergencies that could jeopardize international peace and security. That is the aim of Senegal's full support for today's resolution, which we hope will make a significant contribution to improving the humanitarian situation in armed conflicts.

The holding of this meeting just a few days prior to the convening of the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May, is a source of hope and satisfaction. That will be the first meeting of its kind and will provide an opportunity for world leaders to reiterate their commitment to putting an end to the worst global humanitarian crisis, including addressing the issue of health care in the context of armed conflict. I am pleased to reiterate Senegal's tireless commitment to resolving such conflicts.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time we take the floor in a public meeting this month, I would like to reiterate our congratulations to the delegation of Egypt on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We once again express to you, Sir, our support in ensuring that your leadership of this organ achieves full success. We would also like to thank the Chinese delegation for its work last month. We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his excellent, forthright views. And we thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as Ms. Joanne Liu, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, for their briefings today.

We think it was very useful to hear their perspectives as part of this Council meeting. I should not like to pass up this opportunity to thank the thousands of humanitarian workers, doctors and other health staff, many of them working unrecognized and in a selfless manner, who daily willingly risk their lives in the noble

task of saving lives and alleviating human suffering in such cruel conflict situations as the ones we are seeing today. What they do sets an outstanding example of humanity and hope for peoples being pummelled by violence and horror.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela welcomes the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of wounded and sick people and health personnel, facilities and means of transport in the context of armed conflicts. We are proud to have been among its sponsors. We would like to highlight the particular degree of transparency with which the negotiations were held, which is an excellent example of the way in which we should work. We are grateful for the initiative of Uruguay, Spain, New Zealand, Japan and Egypt in moving forward the resolution.

We think this resolution is an appropriate political response to the grave, systematic violations of international humanitarian law, especially of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, as well as the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, that take place daily in today's bloody armed conflicts in important regions of the world, in particular the Middle East and Africa. We find it unacceptable that health workers and medical personnel have become targets in war zones. It cannot be tolerated that hospitals are bombed, that doctors and the wounded and sick are murdered in hospitals themselves, or even burned alive, as the Secretary-General mentioned. It seems that for many, life no longer has any value.

We are witnessing conflicts that dragging humankind back to times of fascism and lethal wars that are not regulated in any way. Venezuela has never participated in a war or armed conflict since our War of Independence freed us 200 years ago. We have never participated or nor will we participate in a confrontation as part of any coalition of war or destruction, and we will never invade another country. For that reason, we clearly understand the indignation and frustration of the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. The resolution that we have just adopted cannot be allowed to be simply diplomatic rhetoric.

To begin, I wish to state that members of the Security Council that participate in coalitions, wars or invasions are the very ones who must begin by recognizing their actions in contravention of international humanitarian. They must prevent their allies or armies from participating in those types of crimes. We believe that the first concrete step that must be taken by the Security Council is to ensure that its members who participate in such conflicts, coalitions or wars denounce and punish their allies or armies that flagrantly flout the laws that we are discussing today. We are witnessing a descent into barbarism in absolute violation of international law, and we must ensure that it is stopped and avoided once and for all, starting here, the Security Council.

We should be worried that, instead of leading to concrete action on the ground, the resolution become just another political rhetorical step serving countries' specific interests, thus making the resolution merely an instrument of propaganda favouring one side or another. We believe that humanitarian and medical personnel do not deserve that this discussion becomes an issue of propaganda and confrontation among the very countries that are confronting one another in the field of battle. We believe that such violations of international humanitarian law must be dealt with transparently and on an equal footing. There are no deaths or victims of one category or another. They are all victims of barbarism, wherever it takes place and for whatever reason or motive.

It is difficult for us to understand how it is possible, at a time when we are using weapons with such technological precision capable of killing remotely or via satellite link-up at whatever distance, that there could be errors and hospitals could be bombed, despite the fact that they are public facilities whose locations are well known. Their location is public knowledge to all parties to the conflict, and indeed there may even be warning protocols in place in situations to avoid the bombing of such facilities. We do not understand how that can take place, neither do we understand how they can be cited as errors. We believe that attacking humanitarian targets and hospital facilities has become a deliberate act as a way of discouraging the civilian population — as we saw in the previous Israeli campaign against the Palestinian people — in full knowledge of what they were bombing. Yet they still bombed those facilities. As far as we are concerned, such violations of international humanitarian law are war crimes. Ignoring the law is not a excuse for anyone. We believe that the situations that have occurred must be investigated impartially, and the perpetrators cannot serve as judge and jury in that type of situation.

We believe that such violations not only jeopardize the well-being, security and lives of millions of civilians and deepen the crisis, but also represent an extraordinary challenge for medical and humanitarian personnel. As the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières said earlier, it is difficult for them to carry out their humanitarian work. We believe that we must all assist so as to ensure that that situation is resolved and that the Security Council takes action.

Finally, I recall that all States Members of the United Nations are duty-bound to protect their civilians and abide by the resolutions linked to international humanitarian law. We also believe that the proposal to have the Secretary-General report on the implementation of this resolution on a country-specific basis and brief the Security Council once a year on its implementation is very important.

Our country, Venezuela, with the contributions that it may be able to make from the political, ethical and moral perspectives, will do everything possible to ensure and help efforts to stop the horrors of war that we are seeing. It is most important that we achieve peace and enable the medical personnel to continue to carry out their extraordinary humanitarian work in favour of life and humankind.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I am sure that you will ably lead the Security Council through a productive and fruitful month in May. Once again, I wish to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of China to the members of the Council for all the support that they have given us during the month of April. I wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. China has listened carefully to the briefings made by Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the representative of Médecins Sans Frontières.

In recent years, the safety of medical personnel and humanitarian organizations exclusively engaged in medical duties and of the medical facilities and equipment during armed conflict have been increasingly under threat, which has received broad international attention. China pays tribute to the medical personnel and humanitarian-assistance organizations for putting themselves at risk to save lives and care for the wounded and sick. We are concerned about the safety of that personnel and relevant medical facilities and equipment. We therefore support the enhancing their protection by the international community.

I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, protecting medical personnel and facilities during armed conflict is the inescapable responsibility of the States and parties to the conflict. States have the primary responsibility for protecting the population throughout their entire territory, and they should step up the protection of medical personnel and facilities. Parties to the conflict should respect international law, including international humanitarian law, international conventions and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in fulfilment of their obligation to protect medical personnel and facilities, so as to ensure safe and timely humanitarian access. Acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical personnel and facilities during armed conflict should be investigated and punished by States in accordance with the law. The international community should provide the necessary assistance and support on the basis of full consultations with States.

Secondly, medical personnel and humanitarian organizations engaged in medical duties should, in carrying out their humanitarian assistance activities during armed conflict, fully comply with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in providing humanitarian assistance, and fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, avoiding any involvement in the conflict or supporting any of the parties to the conflict. That is the basis of humanitarian assistance — to win the understanding and trust of all parties, which serves as an important guarantee to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities in conflict areas.

Thirdly, the Security Council should actively carry out preventive diplomacy and political good offices with the aim of striving towards the settlement of differences among parties through peaceful means, including through dialogue and negotiation, so as to find a political solution to the questions and to prevent or contain conflicts from escalating in order to fundamentally prevent medical staff and facilities from being threatened.

Fourthly, the United Nations should carry out its actions together with humanitarian assistance

organizations. The United Nations should conduct in-depth analysis and assessments of the risks and challenges faced by humanitarian assistance activities in conflict areas, and, on the basis of respecting the views of States, maintain communications and coordination with all parties to conflict in order to step up the protection of medical personnel and facilities. The relevant medical staff and humanitarian assistance organizations should maximize preparedness for their own safety and protection, while establishing effective communications mechanisms with States, the parties to the conflict and the relevant United Nations agencies and institutions.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I would like to join other Security Council members in congratulating you and your team, Mr. President, on Egypt's assumption of the Council presidency for this month. I reaffirm my delegation's full cooperation, and we wish you and your team every success. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Liu Jieyi and his team for China's effective leadership of the Council in April.

I wish to express my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and to Ms. Joanne Liu, President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for sharing their perspectives and insights on the topic at hand. Their briefings add significant value to our discussion today.

Malaysia welcomes the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which we co-sponsored alongside a significant number of Member States. We commend the leadership taken by Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay on this important initiative, which comes at a very critical juncture. The resolution is an important milestone and stands out as a timely response by the Council in discharging its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, specifically by addressing the increasingly frequent and inhumane attacks against health-care institutions by parties to armed conflict.

Schools and medical facilities in Gaza were targeted and bombed in 2014 during military offensives by Israeli forces, killing and maiming thousands of civilians, including children. The attacks occurred despite the sharing of coordinates of the civilian facilities with the Israeli authorities. In Kunduz, Afghanistan, in October 2015, a medical facility operated by MSF was repeatedly bombarded, killing dozens of civilians, including patients and medical personnel. Most recently, the attack against Al-Quds Hospital in Syria, which killed 57 civilians, was a new low with regard to the protection of civilians, medical personnel and medical facilities. As noted by many previous speakers, a prominent victim killed in the attack was the only remaining pediatrician in Aleppo, Muhammad Waseem Maas. Despite the intolerable stress of living in a city under siege, Dr. Maas chose to stay in Aleppo to treat the wounded and, as his friends put it, "to help those babies crying", instead of joining his family in Turkey. We also heard Ms. Liu's harrowing description of attacks on MSF facilities in Yemen, and we share similar outrage and distress.

Such attacks, whether premeditated or otherwise, are simply unacceptable. They violate basic, established principles of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance. Attacks against medical personnel and health facilities also constitute two-fold atrocities against children. They not only kill and maim children, they also leave them without access to much-needed treatments, including lifesaving care.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) demonstrates the Council's collective resolve in responding to a worsening deterioration of civilian protection in time of conflict. As we seek to maintain international peace and security, the protection of civilians must continue to be at the core of the Council's work. We must reject the notion of "collateral damage" as a convenient excuse to commit and perpetrate attacks against civilians and civilian objects. Similarly, countering terrorism has unfortunately become a convenient narrative to justify attacks on civilians and on humanitarian and medical personnel as well as medical facilities. If by fighting terrorism means we would be carrying out indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the facilities, then, from the victims' point of view, we are no different from the terrorists. As clearly stipulated under international law, attacks intentionally directed against civilians and civilian objects, including medical and humanitarian personnel and medical facilities, constitute war crimes.

Malaysia strongly supports calls to ensure accountability as a crucial step in the fight against impunity with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian objects during armed conflicts. We therefore

call for independent and impartial investigations into all alleged serious violations of international humanitarian law, particularly in connection with the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflicts. We agree with Ms. Liu that perpetrators cannot be investigators, judges or juries. Member States have an obligation to cooperate with the relevant international courts and tribunals in ensuring accountability for war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, in accordance with their international commitments.

In conclusion, we are deeply humbled and touched by the commitment and sacrifice of medical and humanitarian personnel worldwide who devote their lives to saving others under dangerous and trying circumstances. We wish to pay tribute to those who paid the ultimate price in the pursuit of such honourable aims. The Security Council must persist in defending and protecting the safety of medical personnel and health facilities in situations of armed conflict, an undertaking to which Malaysia is fully committed.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

At the outset, it gives me pleasure to express sincere thanks to Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay, which were Egypt's partners in introducing the important resolution 2286 (2016), on medical care in armed conflict. In that context, I would like to draw attention to the unique manner in which the initiative was developed. It is perhaps the first time that five elected Member States of the Council participated in a collective effort to draft a resolution while leading and coordinating consultations in an open, transparent and all-inclusive manner, with all Council members taking part in order to achieve its unanimous adoption. The adoption was reflected in the widespread support for the resolution among the States Members of the United Nations, as well as in the fact that many Member States co-sponsored the resolution.

Humanitarian efforts today face a serious development in the form of the increasing frequency of attacks against medical facilities and medical staff. Parties to the various conflicts have put obstacles in the way to medical services for those in need. This represents an unprecedented challenge to the basic pillars of international humanitarian law and to enforcement of the principle of protecting civilians in armed conflict.

Egypt believes that such attacks foment hatred and tension among parties to a conflict and the various components of society, which undermines the possibility of achieving peaceful settlements to conflicts. As a case in point with respect to the urgency of this situation, I would cite the atrocities committed against health-care providers in many conflicts around the world, but especially in Syria over the last five years, due to the conflict that has been raging there.

International humanitarian law, including the 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, provides for the protection of international health-care personnel, facilities and equipment and their transport. It also sets forth strict rules to protect access to health care by the sick and injured in times of armed conflict. I would therefore stress that the violation of these conventions has been and continues to be totally unacceptable. Perpetrators must be held accountable no matter which side of the conflict they are on. Individual States and the international community as a whole have a duty to guarantee that perpetrators are held to account.

These rules are binding on all parties to a conflict, be they Governments or non-State actors. These rules also prohibit forcing health-care workers to commit acts that prevent them from fulfilling their health-care duties or that violate their professional ethics. International law also prohibits deliberate attacks against medical facilities, designating such attacks as war crimes. Through such a designation, it guarantees the accountability of the perpetrators and deny them impunity.

The initiative behind resolution 2286 (2016), sponsored by five States, seeks to urge the Security Council to uphold the legal framework that requires parties to a conflict to protect the sick and the injured and those working to bring them medical care. The Council needs to send a strong political message that attacks on the sick, the injured and health-care workers are no longer acceptable or admissible, that they can no longer be perpetrated with impunity or without accountability to States. Concerted international efforts must therefore be made to prevent the occurrence of such gross violations of international humanitarian law. Accordingly, resolution 2286 (2016) condemns violations of international humanitarian law, urges Member States to adopt practical measures to prevent their occurrence, and calls on States to ensure peaceful and unimpeded access to medical care.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that Egypt's sponsorship of resolution 2286 (2016) is rooted in its deep and focused commitment to the noble principles of international humanitarian law, in particular those related to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Indeed, Egypt supports access to medical care during conflict — without politicization or discrimination — for the injured, the sick, the vulnerable and those who are most likely to be subject to attack, including women and children. We seek to increase awareness in the Security Council of the violations of international humanitarian law in this area so that we can provide a safer environment for the sick and the injured and for health-care workers.

I would be remiss if I failed to express our gratitude for the sacrifices of and the noble role played by such international organizations as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières and others, which are providing health-care services to innocent civilians who find themselves caught in zones of violence or the victims of terrorist attacks through no fault of their own.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.